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COMMONWEAL

LABOR-SAVING DEVICES

David Kusnet



THE LAITY & THE LIFE OF FAITH

John Scheible

HERITAGE ABANDONED?

Peter Steinfels

HAITI HEATS UP

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'FAITHFUL DISSENT'

Robert G. Hoyt

'THANATOS SYNDROME'

John B. Breslin

THE ARIAS PLAN

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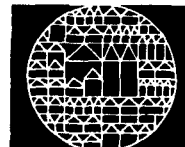
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COMMONWEAL



What's in a name?

Pick-and-choose Catholicism is a bad idea whose time, unfortunately, has come. Ironically, it has been the pope's visit which has focused so much attention on what serious observers of the church have been reporting for years: high proportions of American Catholics consider themselves perfectly loyal members of the church while disagreeing with some of its official teachings. Pick-and-choose Catholicism, the media call it. Cafeteria Catholicism. Smorgasbord Catholicism.

Given the media's weakness for polar opposites, it was probably inevitable that labels like these would be glued to any departure whatsoever from the rulebook Catholicism of pre-Vatican II. But the new labels are deceptive and potentially destructive, and defenders of a legitimate Catholic pluralism should be the first to say so. Father Charles Curran, for example, did exactly that on national TV, stating his opposition to "pick-and-choose Catholicism" on the MacNeil/Lehrer broadcast the evening of the pope's arrival.

Give the new labels their due. They alert the Catholic church to a sociological reality: less and less can it count on religious affiliation as a matter of cultural, ethnic, or family inheritance; more and more it approaches the American model of the church as "voluntary association." The new labels may also remind us that faith must be individually assimilated, often over many years; that the life of grace takes as many forms as there are individuals; and that its mysteries are never encapsulated in our neat formulas. There is a restless, questing, incomplete, and even contentious faith that deserves to be respected and engaged. Catholics of that stripe should never be rejected along with the images that have been coined to label them.

The labels themselves, however, should be rejected. To begin with, pick-and-choose Catholicism, cafeteria Catholicism, and smorgasbord Catholicism vastly exaggerate the disagreements American Catholics have with official church teachings. By and large, Catholics are not picking a random four of the seven sacraments, six of the Ten Commandments, and three out of four Gospels. The disagreements so widely noted are significant ones; nonetheless, they deal with a relatively restricted and specific set of church positions, primarily related to sex, marriage, and the treatment of women. Those familiar with the history of the church's moral declarations on political and social affairs know that going one's own way on such matters, sometimes for good reasons, sometimes for bad, is hardly unprecedented. Considering the backlog of questions the Catholic church has had belatedly to confront since Vatican II, the astounding story may be the degree of agreement rather than disagreement. Compare the vigorous condition of the church throughout the globe a quarter century after the council to its shattered condition an equal number of years after Luther initiated the Reformation. During the papal visit, millions of Catholics have been affirming their belief that, despite the suffering and cruelty witnessed on

every side, this universe is created and sustained by a God of love, who, in Jesus Christ, has joined the human journey and promises victory over death, and whose Spirit enlivens us daily in the church's words and sacraments. In an age that often thinks itself secular, such a massive affirmation shouldn't be taken for granted — nor overshadowed by a difference over birth control.

The new labels not only exaggerate the scope of disagreement among Catholics, they caricature it. Pick-and-choose, cafeteria, and smorgasbord are images suggesting an individualistic, almost offhand approach to making decisions of conscience, one based on personal convenience or taste, if not even whim. This is scarcely fair to millions of Catholics who have often departed from official teachings only reluctantly, after prayer and conscientious reflection, and not before they realized that many fellow Catholics shared the same moral intuitions. They have agonized, they have struggled, they have reached their conclusions not to suit personal convenience but to resolve conflicts they perceived between particular teachings and what seemed to be more central impulses of the Gospel. It would be naive to think that such decisions have never been shortsighted or surreptitiously self-serving. Still, none of the human texture is captured in the consumption images of lunch lines and dinner parties.

But caricature may quickly become reality if these images are allowed to establish themselves not only as a dubious description but as the legitimate norm. Curiously enough, the pick-and-choose, cafeteria, and smorgasbord images level and equate all church teachings in a manner mirroring the rulebook approach of some conservatives. Neither the old nor the new picture recognizes the controlling role of "core truths," as Father Curran put it, on which the church must insist, and from which it extends its teaching to other matters.

There is, of course, a conservative rejoinder — that for Catholics one of those "core truths," indeed practically *the* core truth, is: "the pope decides." Altogether too much history speaks against such a view. Still, the challenge is not to slip from that oversimplification to its opposite. Even "core truths" themselves may have to be examined, rethought, reformulated — that is the burden and the glory of Catholic "development of doctrine" — but the process is a demanding, disciplined, and communal one, a far cry from "pick-and-choose." The new images threaten a Catholicism with few resources to resist the pull of social pressure. There is a kind of subtext to the media's susceptibility to these images — a self-congratulatory note that the church, too, is subject to the laws of a consumer society. Catholics who like to recall that Paul, when necessary, withstood Peter to his face should also recall Paul's admonition, "Do not be conformed to the spirit of this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing, and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

Liberals, conservatives, and centrists may disagree on numerous aspects of diversity and change in the church. It is true but not enough, in our eyes, simply to respond to all indications of widespread Catholic dissent by saying that "the

moral law is not subject to majority rule," or by asserting an ahistorical immutability of teaching. But liberals, conservatives, and centrists can nonetheless agree to refuse the media labels now being thrust upon American Catholicism.

LONG-RANGE SIGNALS

News reports of the visit earlier this month by three U.S. congressmen to the Soviet Union's highly controversial Krasnoyarsk radar station in Siberia read something like a script for a TV miniseries. The three congressmen — Downey (D-N.Y.), Carr (D-Mich.), and Moody (D-Wisc.) — and their entourage, with the Politburo's approval, swept down in Soviet helicopters to inspect and photograph what the U.S. has considered the Soviets' most flagrant violation of arms control agreements. The congressmen not only walked through parts of the thirty-story receiver building and its adjacent eleven-story transmitter, but they took videotapes and over a thousand photographs of the facility. These photographs will be gone over, print by print and dot by dot, by U.S. security agencies.

Psychologically speaking, the Soviets' opening of the half-completed giant radar may have been the equivalent of an addict's indirect appeal for help. The Soviet Union has long denied that Krasnoyarsk would serve as part of an early-warning system, thus breaching the 1972 ABM Treaty. But the U.S. inspection made it clear that Krasnoyarsk is such a component. On the other hand, the inspection indicated that the plant is something less than the hardened battle-management station some Westerners have claimed it to be, a

A Poll finds mix-&-match Catholics

growing number of American Catholics are in sharp disagreement with long-standing Catholic teaching on wearing solids with patterns. That was one of the striking findings of the recent *Commonweal-Women's Wear Daily News* Poll. More than 60 percent of the laity and an almost equal number of priests said they approved of wearing patterns with patterns, "if done tastefully." Among Catholics under thirty-five, the percentages were even higher, with those under six in virtually unanimous dissent from traditional doctrine.

The telephone survey of a random sample of the nation's approximately 53 million Catholics turned up these other surprising results:

- Most Catholic priests identified a "biretta" as either a television program or a small handgun. Only 30 percent recognized the term as designating a piece of clerical garb.
- There was no significant difference between women

far more serious allegation. The inspection indicated that the plant was not wired for such purposes, and that the general construction techniques were quite shoddy, reminiscent of descriptions from Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. As one of the American experts reported, "If you turn it on, it is probably a violation, but not a very good one." Of course, many of the limitations could be rectified in a final push to outfit the station.

Still, the question remains, why did the Soviets open this highly secret and controversial site to Western observers, particularly when these observers' report was likely to undercut previous Soviet dismissals?

There is a long and real history of Soviet violations of arms control agreements. These were reiterated last March in the president's *Report on Soviet Noncompliance of Arms Control Agreements*. But as a detailed analysis of that report indicates (cf. *Arms Control Today*, April 1987), the administration's review "continues to distort the overall compliance picture, exaggerating problem areas of little military significance while ignoring the undisputed positive record of Soviet compliance with most treaty provisions. . . ." In other words, there will always be the need to be sober and watchful: of the other, but also of ourselves.

Untangling the motivations for the Soviet opening at Krasnoyarsk may prove illusive, but it is not unreasonable to view the initiative in light of other concurrences in U.S.-Soviet relations. In May, a tentative agreement was reached to establish joint nuclear risk reduction centers in the U.S. and the USSR. That agreement, signed this month in Washington, is an important measure to reduce the risk of an accidental or unintended nuclear war. Furthermore, in August, as the result of a 1986 treaty, a team of American military officers for the

first time inspected Soviet conventional troop maneuvers on-site. Again, since last year, the Soviet government has allowed the National Resources Defense Council, an independent group of U.S. scientists and arms control advocates, to monitor Soviet nuclear tests with their own seismic equipment and staff in the Soviet Union. This indicates a Soviet willingness for some forms of on-site inspection/verification.

These instances have their limitations. But they add to the perception that the dimensions of *glasnost* may be more far-reaching than once thought possible. As confidence-building measures, these agreements contribute to nurturing that minimal trust on which effective arms control depends.

It is a long way to and from Siberia, and a longer way to arms control, especially when the rules change. The most recent irony is that the U.S., the perennial advocate of on-site inspection, has now indicated it is backing away from its former insistence on such inspection. This is surely misguided. While it is true that on-site inspection may not be crucial for verifying compliance with the total elimination of short- and intermediate-range nuclear weapons, that is not the case for monitoring the *gradual* reduction of long-range strategic forces, the real heart of arms control. In this latter case, on-site inspection—with its rigors and embarrassments—will be an essential component of verifying treaty compliance.

Technology, and even on-site surveillance, will never provide absolute certainty of full compliance. But the chances of sufficient compliance improve as openness and mutual self-interest are deepened. The opening at Krasnoyarsk produced a mix of signals. It will take mutual wisdom and honesty to translate them into a favorable message for humankind.

PONDERING CHAOS

Will Haiti have free and open presidential elections this November as the Namphy provisional government has promised and the Haitian people have every right to expect? In other words, can Haiti begin to be governed by the constitution it overwhelmingly approved earlier this year? While the U.S. government cannot ensure a peaceful transference of power in Haiti, neither can it afford to take a wait-and-see position. Too much is at stake. A country of five million people lives in misery 700 miles from Miami, and anti-American sentiment is festering dangerously.

The economic chaos that has continued since the Duvalier ouster—including the loss of 12,000 assembly jobs when U.S. companies pulled out and cut back, and no sign of new U.S. investment—is at the root of the strong anti-American rhetoric. So is the consistent and uncritical U.S. support of the Namphy government, which, since the violence this summer (see page 518), has been likened to America's thirty-year infatuation with the hated Duvaliers. A significant increase in U.S. economic assistance has not changed these perceptions,

and men on the controversial question of cassock hemlines. About 20 percent of both sexes supported raised hemlines, and an equal percentage favored lowered ones. A small number said it depended on the color of the priest's socks.

● Over 80 percent of American Catholics felt that John Paul II deserved to be ranked among the world's best-dressed men. Adolescent Catholics were even more enthusiastic than their elders. "This dude's got the threads," said one young Catholic, and 95 percent of his cohort evidently agrees. But support for the pope seems to be more than just a matter of wardrobe. "Can you imagine Lee Iacocca or Ed Koch dressed like that?" asked one bishop.

Not even this pro-papal sentiment, however, can patch over the bare facts. American Catholicism is no longer a seamless garment. Asked to comment on the *Commonweal-WWD* survey, a leading archbishop warned, "The church can't change with the fashions." But millions of other American Catholics are evidently determined not to be kept in swaddling clothes.

partly because military aid included crowd control devices that have been used to break up lawful strikes and sabotage peaceful political protests.

It is urgent that the U.S. government demonstrate clearly that it supports the democratic aspirations of the Haitian people and that it intends to back no political favorite. The problem is, of course, that elections themselves cannot insure either stability or democracy. In fact, given the divisions among the opposition parties, the extent and volatility of mob violence, and the general unreadiness of an illiterate, superstitious, and impoverished population to undertake the responsibilities of building a democratic state, chaos is not an unrealistic scenario for post-election Haiti. But fear of chaos, or worse, has too often shaped U.S. foreign policy — and not merely in Haiti — as the U.S. has opted to side with unscrupulous and squanderous leaders to the detriment of generations of the entire native population. This time the gamble must be played differently.

Despite the very real possibility of chaos, Washington needs to state publicly, forcefully, and soon that it takes the coming Haitian elections so seriously that economic assistance will be cut off if fair elections are not held as scheduled. An observation team should be sent to monitor the process, which could properly include representatives of several nations (since the U.S.-Haiti relationship is currently so tense).

In the long run, there is much more to be done, including not only continued economic assistance, but also vigilance about how that money is spent.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., warned in the September 9, *New York Times* against U.S. indifference to Haiti's crisis, and suggested that an international trusteeship be set up to provide some framework for order. Without such a framework, it is difficult to hold any Haitian government, elected or not, accountable for failing to implement agrarian reform programs, to attract foreign investors and employers, to stem capital flight or to allow union activity — all reasonable expectations for a strong Haitian democracy.

It was recently reported that a businessman, fearing political foment, said he'd leave Haiti the moment Namphy left office. The same sentiment cannot be true for U.S. involvement, and the Haitian people deserve to know it.

STRUGGLE IN HAITI

UPROOTING DUVALIERISM

A ROUTE UNSURE & BLOODY

It is always hot in Haiti. But in addition to this long summer's heat, Haiti has been plagued by violence. Little has changed in Haiti since the departure of Jean-Claude Duvalier on February 7, 1986. Poverty is still the primary concern of life; people still walk in fear of the Ton-Ton Macoutes. Poor farmers live in a desert of erosion. Many are forced to seek more fertile ground — either

in the slums of Port-au-Prince or as "boat people."

The one glimmer of hope — for a democratically elected civilian government — was bolstered by the very successful constitutional referendum of March 29, 1987. That glimmer was almost snuffed out on June 19. The interim military (CNG) ignored the constitutionally appointed electoral council and imposed its own electoral decree. At the same time, a general strike was called by a major labor union, CATH. The CNG dismissed two members of the electoral council, outlawed CATH, and jailed its leaders. The constitution so happily voted in by Haitians was cast aside.

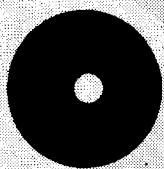
These events ushered in a series of strikes, demonstrations, and protests. Haitians proved themselves capable of sustaining an organized, peaceful opposition movement. But the military and police proved equally capable of a brutal reaction.

The strikes closed down Port-au-Prince. The ubiquitous (public transportation) minibuses, called Tap-Taps, were nowhere to be seen. Barricades of burning tires sent smoke signals from neighborhood to neighborhood. While delivering medicines to the National Hospital, my colleagues and I witnessed soldiers and police firing at unarmed people in the large slums of La Saline and Cité Soleil. In Cité Soleil, two dead bodies still remained in the street. Blood and bullet holes were everywhere. By July 1, there were reports of 25 people killed by the military and over 100 wounded. Nonetheless, the strike and protests generated hope, much of which had been engendered by Catholic church efforts. The basic Christian communities called the *Ti Legliz*, the "little church," rallied to the support of the strike. The battle cry was raised finally to rid the country of Duvalierism and the Macoutes.

The cry was heard and a prophet emerged. Bishop Willy Romelus, the Catholic bishop of Jeremie who is being called Haiti's Oscar Romero, read one of his several statements about the crisis. His pungent use of the Creole language will go down in Haitian history. "*Rache Manyok yo! Ban-moin te-a blanch*" — "pull up the manioc and give back the land clean!" In other words, uproot Duvalierism — Generals Namphy and Regala must go. Romelus later urged the American government to stay out of Haiti's internal affairs and warned Haitians to avoid both extremes of capitalism and Communism.

The pressure on the CNG continued. They rescinded their electoral decree and lifted the ban against the union. But so many deaths had moved the stakes beyond constitutional matters. The issue had become the viability of the CNG.

On Sunday, July 5, we attended the Mass of Father Aristide at St. John Bosco in the hub of one of Port-au-Prince's poorest areas. Père Aristide has become the major proponent of liberation theology in Haiti. The text for the homily was St. Matthew, "I praise you Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children." The priest compared the poor of Cité Soleil and La Saline to the little children in the Gospel. They understood better than the rich and the middle class what was happening and why the strikes were necessary. His strong comments on "American imperialism" and his endorsement of Bishop Romelus's statement were not



On August 24, the Haitian bishops issued a letter commenting on ambiguities surrounding the "popular church" and attempting to seize a middle ground between Marxist socialism and capitalism. So far the letter seems to have fueled the rhetoric of commentators and added to the confusion. Contrasting sharply with a message issued by the Haitian Conference of Religious dealing with the killing of priests at Pont Soudé, the bishops' statement is unfortunately being interpreted as a reversal of their excellent commitment to change in Haiti.

lost on the NBC cameras or the other reporters who salted the crowded congregation.

The "Groups of Fifty-Seven," the coordinating committee of the strike, proposed an alternative government who would take over in the event of the CNG's departure. However, the CNG appears determined to stay. On July 10, ten thousand people marched "to rid the army and police of the Ton-Ton Macoutes." Anti-American sentiment was strong. Signs stating "Aba Ameriken-Satan" were in evidence, as was Haiti's small but influential Communist party. The peaceful demonstration was abruptly ended when soldiers fired tear gas canisters into the crowd in front of the National Palace, injuring three people. Instantly, the peaceful protesters became an angry mob, rampaging through the city breaking windows. The rampage, however, was quickly ended by a torrential downpour. The eroded mountain sides spilled mud knee-deep into the city streets. Coffins were reported floating out of the old downtown cemetery. What the army started, the rains completed. Ten people died in the flood and thousands were left homeless.

For the next two weeks, Haiti buried its dead. The poorer neighborhoods in the capital dug out of the mud. Some wondered aloud whether the record rainfall and the recent events had softened the soil and made it easier to pull up the manioc and clear the land of Duvalierism.

The strike and demonstrations continued but a series of recent events stand out, both for their political significance and their brutality. In the area of Jean-Rabel in the northwest of the country, foreign missionaries and local priests had worked for years building up the "little church" groups and developing a peasant organization referred to as "Tet Ansem" or "Heads Together." Since last year, they had become more involved in land reform efforts and found themselves at loggerheads with the large landowners. Around July 24-25, after a protest march, the "Tet Ansem" groups were ambushed and a brutal massacre took place. Radio Soleil estimated the number of dead at four hundred with many more suffering serious machete wounds. It is still unclear exactly what provoked the massacre. Although some have tried to make much of the religious denominational differences among the groups and the role of the missionaries, it is clear that the land reform question was at the forefront. Both the complexity and the

tragedy of the current situation in Haiti are reflected by the fact that the events in Jean-Rabel are being used to discredit the community organizing by Catholic church workers.

As so often happens, the missionaries and church groups are now being smeared, as they were under Duvalier, with the Communist label. The campaign against the missionaries appears well-organized and well-orchestrated. While traveling in the northwest, an elderly Haitian sister told us, "Now that we are working openly in defense of the poor, they call us Communists." At present, there are investigation teams of professional people, religious, and human rights advocates attempting to unearth the facts behind the events in Jean-Rabel.

On August 8, the Haitian Episcopal Conference issued a statement pleading for calm and nonviolence and calling for a dialogue involving all public sectors. However, at the same time it was made public that Pere Aristide had been transferred. This caused a reaction on the part of his student followers who promptly took over the cathedral in Port-au-Prince in protest. On Sunday, August 23, a solidarity Mass for the victims of Jean-Rabel was broken up by gunfire. Five priests, all active in defense of the poor including Father Aristide, were forced to flee and barely escaped from ambushes and roadblocks set up by the military and apparent Macoutes. Following this, the Haitian National Caritas office issued a strong defense of the Catholic "Tet Ansem" groups denouncing the accusations of violence and Communism.

Presidential elections are scheduled for November 29, but it is impossible to make predictions. Nonetheless, three points for reflection come to mind. First, the sensitivity to American interference in Haiti's political and economic life is at a high point. Second, the splintering of opposition groups and the lack of any strong candidates at present leave the way open for extremists of the left or right. But the danger immediately visible comes from the military right. The education necessary to avoid extremes is precisely the role churches have to play.

Third, the strong and socially active Catholic church has contributed immensely to the construction of a new Haiti. Beginning with the church's "Charter of 1983" on through a number of pastoral letters, programs in literacy, community organization, popular education, and agricultural development have been promoted under Catholic auspices and are leading the fight for social change. A Haitian version of the basic Christian community has been developed.

A recent church symposium stated, "In the name of God, listen carefully, think hard, rise up and act." This is the kind of counsel the church can offer at present. The themes of exodus, diaspora, and Jesus our brother and liberator, need to be understood in the present bewildering and fearful context and lived out in public policy. Bishop Romelus cannot be expected to pull up all the roots alone. Other strong voices are needed to call the government to responsibility, to mobilize the poor, to criticize the rich, and to challenge the middle class.

JOHN P. HOGAN

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THE EASE OF DISTRACTION

ON THE SABBATH & CABLE TELEVISION

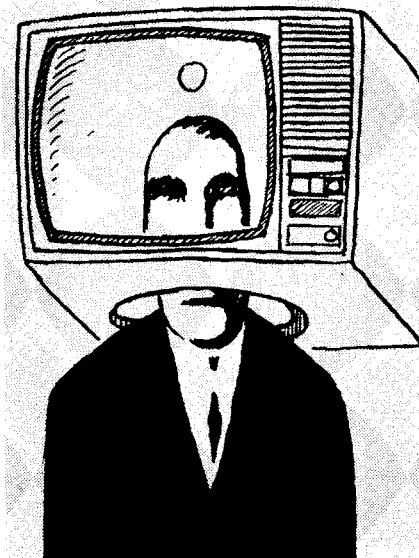
It is as close to an absolute requirement for living in this world as you are likely to find that human beings must think they know more or less what they are doing, what they can expect of life, and why things happen the way they do. We establish little rituals of work, as well as routine habits of thought and relaxation, to reinforce the feeling at a controllable level that life does happen according to certain patterns, and its meaning — whatever we think that may be — can be found by close and wise attention to the patterns.

This is as general an overview as I think anyone has ever given of life as it is lived in common by atheists, agnostics, Orthodox Christians, Conservative Jews, Baptists, Catholics, Shiite Moslems, and Unitarians, as well as everyone else, and I am quite proud of it. (Applause. Thank you, thank you.) We may argue about where the patterns come from or what they indicate about the universe as a whole, but all of us do live with the expectation that life can be understood and the patterns read right. A universe full of trapdoors suddenly opening in reality's floor is a world that may be real, at some level, but it does not allow us to go on together. We need the belief that the fabric of our lives can be seen whole and understood, even if the understanding is rough, only approximate.

But what gets ignored in this consoling myth is the fact that every culture is, almost by definition, so close to itself that it can't see itself for what it is. A culture tends to think of itself as more or less like what it was a little while before, slightly different, but continuous in a way that could be found if we had the ambition to trace the connections. In fact, a culture stops being a culture in some important way when it thinks of itself as

"a culture" — when self-consciousness enters in. Memory is not the same thing as self-consciousness; collective memory, seen as something of value, is essential to a culture. Ours is perhaps the first society to be saturated with self-consciousness, while at the same time we are insensitive to cultural memory.

Self-consciousness is our secular society's blessing and curse. I am enough of a child of the Enlightenment to find the self-questioning which comes with self-consciousness important at every level. It is a sense which comes from a little attention to history, a sense (perhaps born of the slaughters done first in the name of tribes, often combined with the belief that this was the will of God; later done in the name of God, whose will was seen as a kind of church franchise; done still later for the nation-state; and done most recently in the name of ideological correctness) that we will use any excuse we can find to argue, imprison, seize power, or kill in the name of something which has shifted often enough to be suspect. Memory — which includes so many cultural affections and cultural hatreds — is



not enough; it has proven itself lethal at times. It is easy to see why some people have given up the whole search for meaning, and look for what meaning there may be in days at the beach. Ocean sunsets are at least not lethal, though the depletion of the ozone layer may change that.

I haven't given up the belief that we can know things at levels which secular culture has given up on because it can't imagine those levels. (Secularism could almost be defined as a form of giving up, but that's another column.) The difficult task we have is to retain cultural memory and self-consciousness at once, trying to be clear about the limits of both. It could be that our need for a sense of continuous understandings has blinded us to the way some cultural shifts that have happened in a comparatively few number of years have wounded common memory. They have had a profound effect, and have not been sufficiently noticed, perhaps because noticing would shake out need for continuity and would be too unsettling.

Two examples, almost comically unrelated on the surface: the death of the idea of the sabbath and the availability of cable television. They have something in common, and it involves one of those cultural shifts which can happen so softly — like a sound ending rather than anything definitely new coming to be, no new noise here — that it can evade attention.

First, the idea of the sabbath. When I was a child stores all over our middle-sized Midwestern city closed on Sunday. If you wanted to buy a Coke or a chicken or toilet paper or soap, and it was Sunday, you had to go to a single market run by a Jewish family. That store may have been closed on Saturday (and I hope it was, because that would give a more complete esthetic consistency to an argument I want to make), but the point is that for most people every store but one was closed one day of the week, and if you had to buy something that day it was a matter of buying one or two things you had forgotten to buy; it wasn't ordinary shopping.

There was plainly some chafing at this regular closing of stores located more conveniently or more lavishly stocked

than the one store we were stuck with, but there was something important in the feeling families knew during that one quiet day, an undercurrent which is not reinforced at the communal level now, except by those who choose — like the Amish or Orthodox Jews — to live apart in some way from the surrounding culture. Jews and Christians celebrate the sabbath for different reasons, at least at the level where we articulate the reasons for belief, and we celebrate it on different days. It is a lot more convenient not to observe a sabbath at all, and more profitable as well. What a society says when it observes a sabbath — even with some reluctance and irritation, and even when its members may celebrate on different days and for different reasons — is that it recognizes something which matters more than profit or convenience. What a society says when it decides that the observance of the sabbath is less important than profit, or convenience, or competition, is that profit and convenience matter more than the something (admittedly something we are unwilling to define too closely in a pluralistic society) which the sabbath honored. It may be that this something had become so vague, so indefinite, that it was not worthy of honor. But something changed in the tenor of many lives when that vague something was no longer honored, in however tenuous a way. A sabbath, a day of rest, became an individual choice, one made against a busy and noisy backdrop, without a common cultural recognition.

That noise was increased by the presence of television, which is not only a part of our common culture but pervades it. Not only does the urgency of television news, the illusion of immediacy it creates, emphasize what we are to find important; the more banal television programs become the subject of conversation and fantasy. It is depressingly common to hear people at the next table in a cafeteria talking about last night's episode of "Dynasty" or what someone said on Carson's show. It is clear that watching television has become one of the few common family experiences in America. There is something sad, and a little absurd, about the fact that so many people watch stories about other people's

lives on television, and spend so much time doing it that their own lives are passed that way. (One thing you never see on "Dynasty," "Spencer," or "Family Ties," is characters watching television about other people's lives.) Cable television offers a variety ranging from old Disney films to pornography, and VCR technology allows people to watch virtually anything they like, anytime. One current best-selling video cassette series is called "Faces of Death"; it consists of film footage of real people, really being killed, taken from every documentary source the producers could find. Adolescent boys tend to be its biggest fans.

If television has become our common culture, with its emphasis on the immediate, the possibility of satisfying every desire, the importance of meeting every need ("need" and "desire" being interchangeable), we must see what this means in terms of cultural memory. As bad as many previous cultures were, they at least contained wisdom traditions, which said that life's meaning could not be found in the pursuit of money, physical comfort, or distraction. Most people, of course, didn't live up to what their cultures' wisest traditions revered; but the old saw that "hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue" contains an

important truth, and tribute was, at least, paid. A society which has a place for the monastery, even though most of its members find that life a difficult or unpalatable one, is culturally stronger than one which finds the choice of such a life merely baffling. Not that the past was wonderfully healthy; people have enjoyed executions and torture for years, and the fact that religious allegiances are no longer coerced is a great advance. The problem is the ease with which we can now distract ourselves, almost constantly, and the fact that since religion is given the place of a subjective preference, not a path to wisdom, we find it difficult to know how dangerous the way of distraction is. Television exists to tell us things; the way of life offered to us as attractive and even necessary is one the Buddha, the prophets, Socrates, and Jesus would all find at least shallow and beside life's point, if not in fact deadly.

What the vanishing of the idea of the sabbath and the pervasive presence of television have in common is that both phenomena have come about because we have decided that profit, convenience, and distraction from our real daily lives matter deeply, more deeply than a common life. There is something desperately wrong with this; there is also no clear way out of our dilemma.

WORLD WATCH

J. Bryan Hehir

THE ARIAS PLAN FRAMING OUR POLICY CHOICES

Autumn 1987 will be a decisive time for U.S. policy toward Central America. By January options now open will be closed, a direction will probably be set for the rest of the 1980s.

In the opening days of September a spate of articles were staking out the main lines of the policy debate.

● On the Sunday op-ed page of the September 6 *Washington Post*, Henry Kissinger criticized Costa Rican President Arias's peace plan for failing to limit

definitively the Soviet-Cuban role in Nicaragua.

● A contrasting piece by veteran Latin American correspondent Tad Szulc appeared on the same Sunday in the *New York Times*. According to Szulc, Mr. Gorbachev is signaling a desire to disengage from a disappointing client in the region.

● Equally contrasting views about the Arias plan next appeared in two of the leading foreign policy quarterlies. In the Fall 1987 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Susan Kaufman Purcell, director of the Latin American Program at the Council on Foreign Relations, is highly skeptical about the design and mechanisms of the proposal, while in *Foreign Policy* Viron Vaky, once Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and a former ambassador to three Latin American nations, sees the Arias plan as a possible foundation for "positive containment" of Nicaragua.

Some agreement among these authors does exist on the present status of U.S. policy. All of them criticize its lack of coherence — the failure to define objectives clearly and to propose means which are proportionate to the goals being pursued. After six years public doubt persists about U.S. intentions: is the Reagan policy aimed at changing the internal practices and external activities of the Sandinista government, or is the White House irrevocably committed to nothing short of removal of the Sandinistas? The

language of the policy has often suggested the latter goal; but even critics sympathetic to that aim, like Kissinger, still complain of incoherence: "There has been next to no relationship between the administration's fierce rhetoric and its actions."

Incoherence led first to deception in the implementation of policy as revealed in the Iran-*contra* hearings. Now it produces a pattern of drift. The acceptance of the Arias proposal by the other Central American presidents caught the administration by surprise, and took the action substantially out of U.S. hands.

For those who have argued that a fundamental problem in the past several years has been the subordination of Central American interests to superpower concerns, the emergence of a Central American initiative is a positive development and a sign of hope. But the fact still remains, as Vaky puts it, that "no negotiated settlement can be achieved without U.S. participation or over U.S. opposition."

How should the U.S. proceed? Here the authors divide, reflecting the wider divisions among policy makers and the general public, too. Kissinger and Purcell consider the *contras* a major reason why negotiations are now possible, and they argue against a cutoff of *contra* aid. Such an action would be irrevocable and would throw away the ultimate leverage the U.S. has against the Sandinistas. Vaky is much less enamored of the past

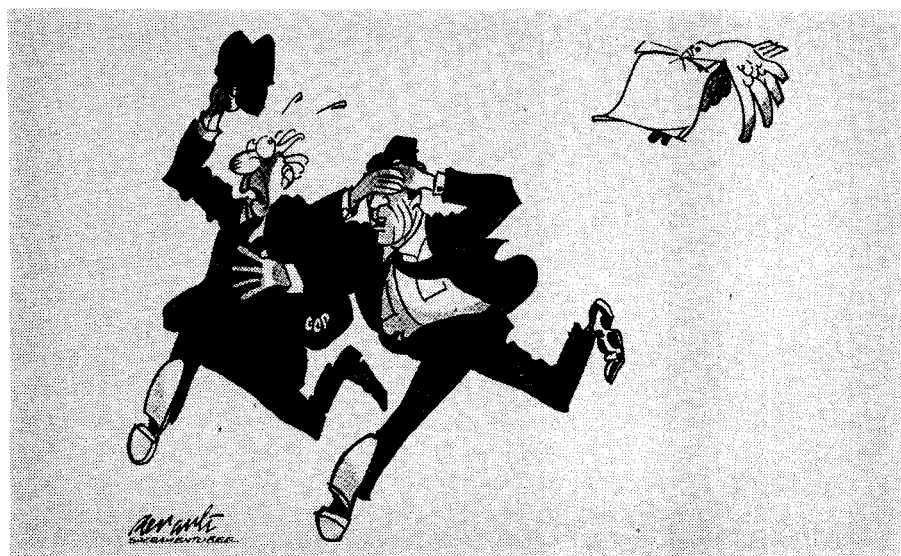
contra role and devastatingly critical of its future prospects. Vaky proposes a sharp break with past policy and the adoption of a more complex mix of incentives and pressures which he describes as "positive containment." Such a strategy accepts the regime as a fact and invokes a multilateral strategy for containing Sandinista ambitions.

Kissinger and Purcell envision continued aid to the *contras* until the long-term viability of the Arias proposal can be tested. Essentially they want the congressional vote on aid divorced from the progress of the peace proposals since the viability of the Arias plan cannot be determined this autumn. In an ominous sounding warning, Kissinger asserts, "The opponents of administration policy should not take upon themselves the historic responsibility of perpetuating in this hemisphere a Marxist-Leninist regime without any safeguards with respect either to security or to human rights."

Framing the choice this way places all the burden on the opponents of aid. They are the architects of potential disaster; all the liabilities are listed on the side of altering the present policy. Continuing aid is necessary because it keeps "options open for the future."

This depiction of the policy choice on *contra* aid — admittedly only one dimension of the larger Nicaraguan, Central American, and East-West questions — fails to meet two objections. First, it is a very benign and complimentary conception of the role the *contra* connection has played in Central American policy. An equally plausible description — at the very least — is that *contra* aid has obstructed any coherent and serious diplomatic approach by the United States, that it is inevitably a stop-gap measure, and that the most it can promise is continuation of war in Nicaragua with the potential of wider war in the region. Not a very benign instrument of policy.

Second, *contra* aid stands indicted on other grounds; it perpetuates the killing without even a reasonable prospect of serving other purposes. Vaky sums it up bluntly; "in effect asking Nicaraguans to bleed and die for U.S. strategic interests that Americans would rather not die for themselves."

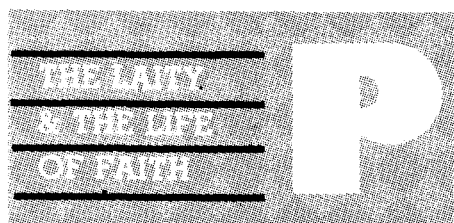


"Run for cover! We're under attack!"

CALLED TO BROADEN MY HORIZON

JOHN SCHEIBLE

AN ENGINEER TAKES HIS KNOCKS



Perhaps the greatest constant in the midst of so much change in my life is the beneficent presence of others. I'm a self-

motivated, independent person. But without relationships, the fallacy of independence is painfully clear. My view of God is influenced by this realization. My strengths, hopes, and accomplishments stand on the one hand; my needs and blessings received appear on the other.

Certain images, adjectives, and roles have formed my self-image at different points. This self-image defines how I see the others in my life. That these images change with time seems obvious, but still it is something I'm struggling with. These images are extremely powerful ways the Lord touches me at given times. When they change they indicate I am moving on to new horizons.

In high school my predominant self-image was "athlete." People looked to me as a talented player and leader. I had always done well at my studies, but the image of student or scholar didn't motivate me yet. Playing ball was the real thing!

About that same time I began to have questions about my faith. What's in this for me? What religious images mean something to me here and now? Because of the example of my family and friends, I had a definite sense that the answers to those questions would be important for me.

Perhaps the best illustration of my questioning was my reaction to the Nicene Creed. This creed was very troublesome. I stopped repeating it blindly, with no clue as to what it really meant. Yes, there were folks who said: "It means what it says. It's that simple." Yet it didn't seem so to me.

Shortly thereafter I attended a university and found the image of student/scholar becoming more and more meaningful. Now learning was actually fun.

Freshman year I stumbled into a great course in theology. The first book we read was *Church Dogmatics in Outline*, by Karl Barth. It's a fascinating view of the Apostles' Creed, one that stirred me to re-examine and develop my own view. The entire experience — the book, the students (and new friends), the professor and teaching assistant — was an unexpected delight.

As an engineering major at a large university known for its liberal heritage, I loved to surprise people with strong interests in music, art, history, and theology. Engineering faculty were puzzled when I took more courses than recommended, especially when many of them were in liberal studies.

Eleven years later I find many more images that motivate and to some extent describe me: engineer, pilot, pianist, tennis player, boyfriend, and believer.

Today I work at a multinational chemical company as a chemical engineer. My specific job carries the title "Project Engineer," the team leader of a group of technicians and engineers. We work on specific installations of capital (equipment and machinery). The goal is to provide a manufacturing unit capable of producing certain chemical products safely and efficiently within a fixed budget and time frame.

The project engineer is the one team member who has responsibilities beyond his or her technical area. We communicate the technical scope and cost to management for approval, organize the team and focus it on the mission ahead, write status reports at various critical times, define and maintain interrelationships between the people in different disciplines, and define tests that ensure the facility has met the objectives and all legal requirements. Sound boring? It very

EDITOR'S NOTE: In July, *Commonweal*, began a series in anticipation of this coming October's synod on the laity. We asked a number of lay people to reflect on how their Catholic faith is lived out daily, particularly in

the workplace. What ethical parameters and spiritual viewpoints do they bring to work and take home? Our contributor this time is John Scheible, a practicing engineer in a large chemical company.

rarely is. It's the responsibility inherent in the job that causes the greatest satisfaction and excitement, but also the nagging pain in your gut and some sleepless nights.

The dangers of explosions, fires, and lethal gas leaks are familiar to all practicing chemical engineers. It is our job to analyze the risks in a certain design and to reduce them to an "acceptable" level. How low is low? We often have to figure that one out for ourselves. Then we have to argue for that analysis and solution. We make it our own and commit to it.

It takes time, money, expertise, and commitment to reduce risk successfully. The project engineer, as the spokesman and center of the team, is challenged at every stage of the project life. If you are successful, you are assigned larger and more complex jobs. If you're not, you go looking elsewhere for employment, at the very least.

How does the theme of the presence of the Lord through others appear in my work? What self-images or roles am I being influenced by today? I had a mentor when I first arrived. He was the guy everyone loved being around — full of good humor, interested in you right here and now, eager to teach and to learn. He had the twinkle in his eye that showed his zest for life. People saw it and were drawn to him.

He never told me what to do on my projects. When I thought I had a solution, he pointed out that it had limits and conditions. There were more solutions, some even better than mine. He taught the importance of teamwork and of gaining the respect of others, and of "bridging the gap" between the engineers in different disciplines. When I would share my frustrations over the shortcomings of others, he would smile and say: "Unless you've walked a mile in my moccasins, don't get on my back!" He was a wise man.

He had just experienced a divorce. The experience affected him — the cigarette smoking, the beer gut, the disaster area of a desk. Yet he never dwelled on it. He had a very positive outlook on life.

A little while later, I ran into trouble on a project. There was this "rush" job that had to be installed now. (Beware of the rush job!) I was told: "No need to ask questions, son, just install it, dammit." The technical details involved containing pressures of over 4000 psi. The operation was inherently dangerous. My analysis showed the potential of developing much higher pressures in a big hurry.

Looking back on the experience, my foes, most of whom were older and very suspicious of new technology and engineers, take on a warm, humorous look. I remember the famous cartoon character, Foghorn Leghorn, walking up to the little rooster (me in this case) who was reading a book on how to design a new and better trap for a "chicken hawk." Foghorn's response showed his proud contempt of a new concept and young roosters: "Boy, I say, boy, I say whatcha got your nose in that book there for, son!" But this was no cartoon. The boos were very real, and my boss (alas!) was leading the chorus.

My mentor saw the problem, but could offer no technical solution. The resolution was my job. But he did help enormously by encouraging me to search — for data to support my

hypothesis, for others with experience with similar systems, for technical journal articles. With some effort I came up with a credible solution.

The short-term consequences were not pleasant. I had gone from budding young star to "bum" almost overnight. I took a beating at the polls — the next performance review. But I did learn to (1) analyze and communicate clearly the risks associated with a given design; (2) obtain supporting data; (3) seek out help from others; (4) propose a design up to my standards; and (5) stand by that view. Better to take the heat now than to install a machine that doesn't work or, worse yet, hurts someone.

This personal element is often overlooked in engineering. The presence of real commitment, positive encouragement of fellow workers (and especially from those with seniority), often creates the atmosphere necessary for positive results. The ability to buck the flow, when supported with adequate data and theory and alternatives, is critical. Yet technical complexity across disciplines, potentially dangerous processes and equipment, and business pressures often create a very different climate. The inquiry into the Challenger shuttle disaster posed just such an atmosphere: Senior people putting on the "business hat" (also referred to as a frontal lobotomy) becomes an excuse for neglecting expert opinion and data. The presence of others in positive ways can't be overstressed.

Not long after, I learned from my mentor that he had just been diagnosed with a brain tumor. The next few months were nightmarish for him and his family. I remember seeing him in the hospital a short time later and being shocked by the sight.

He came into the office during a brief remission to say hello. Actually, he was saying goodbye. At one point he broke down and cried. What a shock to the everyday mood of the office. I shudder as I remember the moment — the sense of unease at how little I could comfort him and how utterly useless my offer of prayer seemed. It felt so empty. I never saw him again.

The funeral was surprising. They read his poetry. Poetry? It was a poem of a hunter and a deer, of nature and beauty and life. What a transforming experience. I forgot my loss as I wondered at how much more he was than what I knew. Even in death he (He?) was teaching me that my views and thoughts and feelings are often so very narrow. I miss him now and remember him in the words of the psalmist: "Man's days are like those of grass; like a flower of the field he blooms; the wind sweeps over him and he is gone. . . ." (Psalm 103). That passage hits me a little too close for comfort.

The Psalms tend to describe feelings, moods, and situations with which I can identify. There's a sense that this material is unfiltered by kindly bureaucrats wishing to save me from difficult theological concepts. The Psalms individually and collectively move me more powerfully than any other book.

The Psalms speak to me, also in my flying experiences. How I love flying. I feel like a kid does when he knows he's having too much fun. Each flight brings new challenges and beauties. The scenery and perspective dazzle and enchant. Changing weather fascinates, surprises, and sometimes terrifies me.

Early in my student pilot days I took a flight with an experienced pilot and friend. We had been flying for about an hour or so when the visibility and ceiling began slowly to diminish. We radioed Flight Service for the latest local weather and radar report. "All clear" was the answer. So we pressed on, reassured and confident. A lightning bolt at twelve o'clock changed all that. The pilot let out a howl that could be heard for miles. I was too shocked to make a noise.

We found out later that we had tangled with a severe thunderstorm, with cloud tops over 45,000 feet high. I found my friend's reaction rather humorous. The guy with the "right stuff" suddenly is on the verge of tears! He sure didn't look or sound like Chuck Yeager (then again, neither did I).

Life often seems to treat us like that. There's always something there to surprise you, to jolt you out of your complacency, to show that your hopes and dreams and your very life itself depend on so much more than one can imagine. "All your breakers and your billows pass over me . . . my help, and my God" (Psalm 42).

Which brings me to the church. Actually, I have been describing what I think of as church. It is people in their everyday lives: basketball players, students, professors, engineers, pilots. And yet it's so much more than I can see just now. My horizon goes on just so far.

I am fortunate to attend a parish where this presence of people in all their wondrous display of talent, joy, anger, and peace is accepted. It seems to me an acceptance that reflects the attitude that we all need each other, have something to learn from and to give to others. It's an acceptance of personal limitation, but also a powerful image of a church that cannot be described totally or even most appropriately by words, pronouncements, and orders. The people do it so much more elegantly by their lives. Bernard Lonergan wrote, "Religion in an age of crises has to think less of issuing commands and decrees and more of fostering the self-sacrificing love. . . ." I think the people who are the church already recognize this.

Such a lack of clear distinction between what might be called the sacred and the profane may seem puzzling and in need of clarification. Am I disdainful of laws, decrees, and authority? Do I not believe all the commandments and strictures in the Scriptures, and pronounced more or less accurately by the "official" church? Is there no difference between the church and our secular lives?

My experience as an engineer and a pilot is telling. My career and life depend on my respect for and knowledge of law. To flaunt laws carelessly is to court disaster. But I also know that laws need to be applied to the here and now, not by Einstein or St. Thomas, but by me.

In fact, my life cannot be fully explained by laws and decrees. There are too many variables, interactions, and surprises. My horizon includes the standard "church" elements, but that is a subset of the greater arena where the Lord meets me. Images of what I might be, people with their love for me, and the Lord call me to broaden my view and horizon. I hope I'll be up to the challenges.

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UNIONS TRY THE NEW SOFT-SELL

DAVID KUSNET

More than eight thousand people gathered in the Miami Beach Convention Center on the evening of July 29 for an unusual kind of revival meeting. When people got up to testify, they spoke not of their own sins but of their employers'. If there was a devil to be denounced, he had human form: Frank Lorenzo, chairman of Texas Air, which owns Eastern Airlines, and under whose regime the company has been taking a tough line against employees and their unions.

The brand of redemption preached at the rally was decidedly of this world. Workers from different industries and walks of life were urged to recognize their common problems and common interests and make a renewed commitment to the cause of labor solidarity. Miami's "Jobs with Justice" rally — part of a series of similar events planned for cities throughout the country — was an effort at revival, revival of a labor movement that in recent years has attracted public attention mostly for losing political influence, economic clout, and public esteem. Miami's sizable and spirited labor rally was a sign that the movement's decline may be exaggerated and its revival may be unrecognized. The new "Jobs with Justice Campaign" is one of many new initiatives being undertaken by an old movement.

Some of these initiatives resemble "Jobs with Justice" — evangelical efforts to fire up current members and recruit new ones to the fighting faith of solidarity. But other initiatives, particularly those endorsed by a recent AFL-CIO report that has come to symbolize labor's self-examination, de-emphasize the congregational aspects of unionism and stress its role as a service organization that can provide a new generation of workers with job training, legal insurance, and even low-cost credit cards.

Whether labor will emphasize mass movements or mass marketing — or a combination of these approaches — remains

to be seen. But, as the Reagan era draws to a close, there are definitely signs of change in the air. Indeed, in this year's round of Labor Day punditry, in addition to the usual dirges for American unionism, there were predictions from sources as unlikely as the *Wall Street Journal* and conservative commentator Kevin Phillips that, after years of decline, the labor movement may finally be making a comeback.

Change is coming to American labor several decades later than to other major institutions. During the turbulent sixties and seventies while the churches, the universities, and the Democratic party each took a hard look at themselves and submitted to wrenching processes of reform, organized labor — or at least its major national institution, the AFL-CIO — seemed immune to self-examination, much less self-transformation. To the outside world, the movement's public face was George Meany's: the gruff, octogenarian patriarch whose views of unionism and society itself were shaped before the social revolutions of the thirties and appeared hostile to those of the sixties.

An unquestioned leader in achieving much of the social progress of the past half-century, the AFL-CIO was nonetheless conservative in maintaining its own traditions while the world changed around it. Large corporations might change their logos and their names, if not their ways of doing business, but the AFL-CIO entered the eighties as much the same institution that had been founded a quarter-century before. So it is especially remarkable that, for the past five years, American labor has been engaged, not only at the grassroots level but in its highest councils in a remarkable process of self-criticism — acknowledging its failures, reshaping its public image, and, perhaps most painfully of all, questioning the very nature of the service it offers.

This self-examination began undramatically five years ago, when AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland appointed a special committee to "review and evaluate changes that are taking place in America in the labor force, occupations, industries, and technology." The assignment might sound technical and the group's name, Committee on the Evolution of Work, was unprepossessing. But, as Gus Tyler, assistant president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, observed, this

DAVID KUSNET directed publicity in organizing campaigns for the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). He was a speechwriter for the late AFSCME President Jerry Wurf and for Walter Mondale during the 1984 campaign.

committee may have "a potential impact on U.S. unionism as profound as that of Vatican II on the Catholic church."

For three years, the committee listened to a variety of voices not usually heard by top labor leaders, including outside experts such as Harvard economists Richard Freeman and James Medoff and the pollster Louis Harris, who helped review public opinion research from the past quarter-century and conducted additional surveys. Eventually the committee issued a tightly written, thirty-four-page report, "The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions," which discussed the labor movement's problems with unusual forthrightness — and offered recommendations that until recently would have been considered heretical.

"The Report," as it has come to be known in union circles, began with the grim — and familiar — statistics revealing a sharp decline in union membership as a percentage of the work force, down from 35 percent in 1954 to less than 18 percent three decades later. While noting that the drop in union membership results largely from the decline in heavily unionized industries such as auto and steel, "The Report" made clear that the fault also lies with the union movement itself. In words difficult to imagine Meany sanctioning, much less speaking, the report acknowledged the simple truth: "Unions find themselves behind the pace of change."

"The pace of change" is reflected in the experience and attitudes of today's workers. They are likely to work at many different jobs — perhaps at several careers in several industries — during their lifetimes. They seek "high discretion as well as high pay" on the job, and "the striking new factor is a shift in which Americans are less likely to see work as a straight economic transaction providing a means of survival and more likely to see it as a means of self-expression and self-development." And they "by and large see themselves as independent, self-confident, self-reliant, and skeptical of chains of authority."

Asked to evaluate their jobs, 51 percent of these workers claimed they are "very satisfied," a finding unsurprising to any shrewd union organizer; in today's America, it is virtually an admission of failure for a working person, particularly a white-collar worker, to acknowledge dissatisfaction with his or her job. But pressed further, most workers did admit to a measure of dissatisfaction, not so much with their paychecks as with their lack of power and prospects. Only 40 percent said they are satisfied with their opportunity to participate in decisions affecting their jobs, and only 28 percent said they are very satisfied with their opportunity for career advancement.

Clearly, there is a potential constituency for organizations

dedicated to improving workers' jobs. Yet non-union workers took a dimmer view of the existing labor movement than of their own work situations. Sixty-five percent of non-members agreed that "unions force members to go along with decisions they don't like." Sixty-three percent said they believe union leaders, not the members themselves, decide whether to go on strike. Fifty-four percent agreed "unions increase the risk that companies will go out of business"; 57 percent believe that "unions stifle individual initiative"; and 52 percent believe that unions fight change.

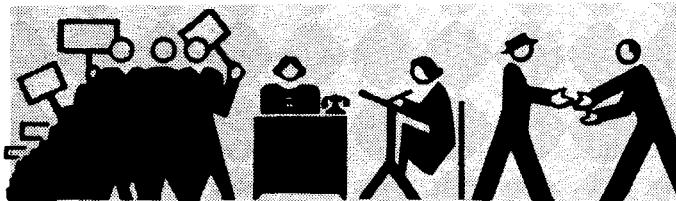
However, the same workers did see a role for employee organizations which they imagined would be different from traditional unions. Sixty-one percent of non-union workers said they would be interested in joining an organization that provides information about job training and job opportunities, and almost half favored collective action on issues like on-the-job grievances. In addition, a majority would be willing to pay up to \$50 a year for membership in an organization that provided such benefits as health and legal insurance, discounts on consumer goods, and low-cost credit cards.

These findings paint a portrait of today's worker far different from the figures portrayed in the mural on the ground floor of the AFL-CIO's headquarters: assembly-line operatives and building tradesmen who expected to work at basically the same job for all their lives and understood that their own futures were linked with their unions'. Today's workers — or at least their self-images — are at once more traditionally American and more contemporary. They are individualists who believe their futures are in their own hands and are reluctant to offer unconditional loyalty to an employer or a union.

To such an audience, labor's message of solidarity is, as a labor priest once said, "inherently countercultural." Labor, then, shares a common dilemma with churches, community groups, and any other institution that tries to bring Americans together: How to promote collective action in what may be the most individualistic society on earth?

As with other organizations that demand dues, activism, and even personal sacrifices from those who join, unions offer tangible benefits to their members. From the founding of the American Federation of Labor more than a century ago, the labor movement has had a dual identity, part social movement, part service agency. Indeed, as unions become entrenched, they offer their members an implicit business proposition: Pay us dues, and in return we will negotiate a contract with your employer providing you with better pay, fringe benefits, and working conditions, and, on top of that, we'll represent you in any individual problems you may have on the job.

Believing in an idealistic conception of unionism as a movement with a mission to change society, generations of radicals have attacked this implicit bargain as "business unionism" — a kind of occupational insurance policy where the worker pays the union his premium and gets a measure of economic security in return. But it's a bargain that has bene-



fited generations of workers who, wearied by the demands of jobs and families, have limited their participation in their unions to paying their dues, honoring picket lines during strikes, and, more often than not, voting for labor-endorsed candidates.

The AFL-CIO report updates this brand of service-agency unionism by proposing new services that unions can provide, new forms of representation they can offer on the job, and even new forms of union membership. Acting on the recommendations of its report, the AFL-CIO now offers members a "Union Privilege Mastercard" — the lowest-priced nationally distributed credit card — and plans to provide other discounted services, including life insurance, legal services, supplemental health benefits, and even Individual Retirement Accounts. In the collective bargaining arena, "The Report" recommends that unions adjust to the individualism of today's workers, particularly white-collar professionals, by abandoning the rigidity of hard-and-fast contracts setting the same pay, benefits, and work rules for everyone. Instead, unions could negotiate minimum guarantees and leave individual employees free to bargain for their own pay, benefits, and working conditions. And, in what may be the most revolutionary recommendation of all, "The Report" suggests new forms of membership for workers who want to join unions but are not covered by union contracts. At a cost of \$50-a-year — considerably less than the dues for most unions — working people would become "associate members" of unions in their industries, receiving job counseling, union publications, and discounted services such as the new credit card. In particular, these associate memberships would be offered to workers who have left unionized jobs, workers who want to organize unions at their workplaces, and others who are interested in the package of services a union can offer.

This brand of unionism is best suited for white-collar work forces that enjoy relatively peaceful relationships with their employers — for instance, public employees in the Northeast and Midwest. In fact, "The Report" reflects many of the tactics used years earlier by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), almost half of whose members work at white-collar government jobs.

As an organizer and publicist in AFSCME campaigns from 1976 through 1984, I can now confess — or brag — that we helped create a new vocabulary of union organizing that emphasized the representation unions offer, while downplaying confrontation with the employer and even the word "union" itself. In leaflets for secretaries, social workers, psychologists, and other white-collar employees, we urged them to choose "professional representation," which would benefit them at the bargaining table, in their government bureaucracies, and in legislative bodies at the local, state, and national levels. The union was presented as a highly professional service agency, with a staff of economists, lawyers, researchers, negotiators, and lobbyists — just the kind of organization government employees would

want to have working in their behalf.

Presenting unionism in this way raised the hackles of veteran unionists blooded in the labor wars of the thirties and forties — and also younger radicals who saw unionism as a way to continue the struggles of the sixties. But, during the seventies and eighties, the union-as-white-collar-service-agency has proven attractive to government workers, employees of educational institutions, and other workers from the service sector, particularly in workplaces where employers offer relatively little resistance to union organizing.

Two years after "The Report," what was once a heresy is now orthodoxy. In Ohio, AFSCME won fifty thousand new members with a low-key campaign stressing the union's role as a "new voice for state employees," defeating the Communications Workers, Hospital Workers, and other unions, all of which took a more traditional approach. In Texas, Louisiana, and other states, the American Federation of Teachers begins its organizing campaigns with mailings offering teachers' liability insurance, travel plans, a professional magazine, discount legal help, and a voice in the education reform process. And, in a campaign to organize white-collar employees at Blue Cross and Blue Shield — an employer which depends heavily on union-negotiated health plans — a coalition of unions spearheaded by the AFL-CIO is stressing our old AFSCME slogan: "strong representation."

However, on labor's old battlefronts — the Northeastern nursing home which cheats its workers out of overtime pay, the Midwestern factory where the company is demanding give-backs, or the Southern textile mill where management fires employees suspected of union sympathies — these soft-sell tactics are part of a future that hasn't happened yet. In these industries, organizers are searching for new ways to conduct old-fashioned union evangelism: not by appealing to workers as isolated individuals but by melding individuals into a fighting force. Instead of the high-tech strategies of "The Report" and the public sector unions, the blue-collar unionists are reviving the oldest union tactics of all: activating the members through personal contact, confrontational tactics on the shop floor, and marches and rallies on the city streets.

Mobilizing the membership at the work site is the essence of the "in-plant strategy" developed by a United Auto Workers (UAW) local in St. Louis and endorsed by the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO. At a time when strikes are increasingly risky, this strategy keeps the workers on the job and in the workplace — but demonstrating their solidarity and causing trouble for their employer. At the Moog Automotive Plant in St. Louis, UAW members refused overtime, held lunch-time rallies, and marched into management offices to complain about unsafe conditions. Without going on strike, the Moog workers won a contract providing a 36 percent increase in pay and benefits over forty months — and unionists

around the country took notice. The AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department published a booklet entitled "The Inside Game" explaining how to involve union members in new tactics at the work site; unionists across the country have ordered so many copies, it has gone into four printings.

The "Jobs with Justice" campaign that rallied eight thousand workers in Miami is an effort to take membership mobilizing tactics out of the workplace and into the community. In this campaign — which is also endorsed by the Industrial Union Department — union activists ask their co-workers to participate in just five events a year: possibly, a rally, a picket line, political canvassing, or leafleting a plant gate. If significant numbers of unionists make such a seemingly modest commitment, unionism could become a vibrant movement again, not only in union strongholds like New York, Chicago, or Detroit, but in virtually any community with even one major unionized workplace — an auto plant, the phone company, or the school system. Once again, telephone workers would join

picket lines at nursing homes; teachers would ask computer programmers to consider organizing; and rank-and-file unionists would ask their neighbors to support labor-endorsed candidates. Not only the concept of union membership — but the concept of citizenship itself — would take on new meaning.

For anyone who believes in the values of community, it's more inspiring to imagine unionists walking each others' picket lines than peddling credit cards and IRA's. But the same worker who may be persuaded to embrace the concept of solidarity might originally have joined the union because it offered consumer credit, job counseling, or other services. Labor's Vatican II — like other efforts at self-examination by major institutions — has pumped new life into an old movement and legitimized all manner of innovations. And a process that began with the question of how to appeal to workers as individuals may yet result in building new bonds of solidarity among them.

Pamela Rice Porter
Ruth's Love Letters, 1918-1919

Before the mystery of the oak
wardrobe I breathe the dark odor of centuries.
Ruth has sent me to find her gold
leaf brooch. Across the floor, the bed's white
spread, mottled light scatters,
then settles. My hand in a shadowed corner
brushes a small bundle: six letters
tied with string, mildewed
and brittle, two from France,
four from Arizona.

The letters have lain as long
as her mother's laundry basket
against the back door. They began
to form their presence here before
his gray coat first hung
from its nail
on the frame of the unfinished house
whose ghost still creaks
on that unsectioned scrap of prairie
not half a mile away.

If I turn slowly, without breathing,
I might glimpse Ruth's tattered dress,
her burr-laden socks limp
over the chair, feel the patched
cotton sack weighting down the porch.
They will be there; they will be
everywhere they have been,
earning their small streaks
her yet-uncrooked hands made
wiping the cuts that bolls opened daily.

The tree must contain also its bare
roughness, spread of black against black
over the house, when a crow
rattled its wings through February cold
like his suffered breathing her sleep.
The same round glasses that lie
each night folded on her window sill
sharpened some distant flash, perhaps
the 3 A.M. train — his last
letter in the mailbag, hardly
heavier that air, waiting.

And silence. Not the tiny explosions
of her mother's wooden wheelchair
across the kitchen floor, no sound
at dawn to his sister's
halted running over the plowed-black
field: no time found her
alone, as she wished, in the rows
white with frost before the sun
hanging red, low, between darkly
budding trees.

Still, it haunts the house,
the ache that could not fill
his next breath nor slow
the sun from easing winter's burden
of winter, aiding the violence
of spring. The gold pin
reveals itself, fragile roundness
of linked leaves. On the porch
we look toward the grass-grown tracks
and I open my palm where it rests,
having long beyond memory lain hidden.

THE HERITAGE ABANDONED?

CATHOLIC THOUGHT ON WAR & PEACE — PART II

PETER STEINFELS

George Weigel's *Tranquillitas Ordinis: The Present Failure and Future Promise of American Catholic Thought on War and Peace* (Oxford, \$27.50, 512 pp.) is a book of politics, history, and theology. As politics, it takes the side of the Reaganites and liberal interventionists about the centrality of the East-West conflict and the appropriate role of U.S. military force in international affairs. As history, it purports to describe the post-conciliar "abandonment" by American Catholic religious leadership of a heritage of thinking on war and peace that should have specially equipped the U.S. church for dealing with the twin problems of totalitarianism and total war. Theologically, it strives to reassert that heritage in a particular American form.

In a previous article (Sept. 11), I touched briefly on the politics of Weigel's book but concentrated on the distortions in its historical account — the accumulated misrepresentations, one-sided comparisons, biased selection of evidence, forcing of material into inappropriate and extreme categories, and the neglect of context. Even if this bad history had no further effect on Weigel's argument, it should not go unchallenged. Indeed, even if the overall picture of Catholic war-peace discussions were to conform to Weigel's description, the specific writers whose names dot his text and notes deserve not to have their thoughts disfigured in what may easily be taken for a scholarly account.

Why has this author, whose intelligence as well as industry are evident throughout *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, produced a history of this sort? The only explanation I can hazard takes us from the historical aspect of the book back to the political. Notice that terms like "anti-Amerika," "anti-anti-Communist," and "neo-isolationism," which play a prominent role in Weigel's analysis, are not coinages native to Catholic discussions about just-war theory, pacifism, liberation theology, or social justice. Whatever their value, they are imports. They descend from sixties debates between different factions of the anti-war movement, debates which, going back, reflected ancient divisions over Stalinism among secular leftists and, going forward, fed into the polemics of ex-radical

neoconservatives and "Cold War liberals" against post-Vietnam liberalism generally. Thus a critique originally dealing with developments in the New Left, the anti-war movement, and liberalism is here applied to the Catholic world. The application is not completely fanciful. A significant number of Catholic peace activists echo New Left and secular anti-war themes. In encountering such views, Weigel may well have felt the relevance of this critique to be confirmed. Was he then psychologically primed to extend it ready-made to "Catholic elites," scouring *Commonweal* and *America* for the necessary "proof texts," committing them to index cards, and then dealing them out to fit the preexisting categories of the critique?

I am, of course, only speculating. But this speculation has the merit of not only explaining the gap between the intelligence at work here and the routine bending of evidence, it also helps explain the gap between the book's occasional pleas for constructive rethinking and its otherwise harsh prosecutorial tone. Internecine debates on the left have never been distinguished for fastidiousness or generosity. Since opponents are viewed as either morally corrupt or morally obtuse, and at stake is the preservation of true doctrine, the object has usually been to discredit more than persuade. (A Catholic would not imagine that this attitude is unique to the ideological left.) Ex-radical neoconservatives have imported this *furor polemicus* into their current "war of ideas." Fundamentally, they believe that existing liberal elites must be thoroughly discredited — ideologically run out of town, so to speak — and replaced by conservative ones. They like to refer to Pareto's "circulation of elites," although the spirit is no different from Lenin's scornful assignment of certain groups to the "dustbin of history." There is not much room for distinctions or niceties in such a process, and the resort to branding adversaries "anti-American" or "totalitarian" has become positively casual. For reasons, I believe, of faith and temperament, Weigel certainly stops short of traveling all the way down this road. But he has allowed the ideological matrix of his analysis to propel him farther than he should have. If the positions of his Catholic moral and intellectual elites are truly as monolithic, extreme, and ill-founded as he suggests, then there is really no hope for dialogue until the whole bunch, from bishops and their staff members to peace activists and journalists, are swept out and replaced.

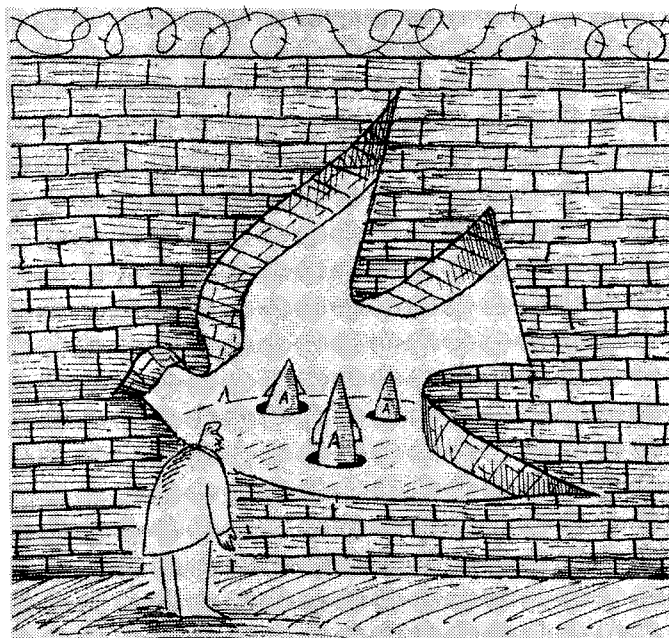
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Unfortunately, it is not only in tone but in substance that these historical exaggerations and distortions have an impact on the third (and potentially the most useful) prong of Weigel's work — the theological.

This theological argument is basic but crucial: just-war theory must again be seen in relation to the larger framework which gives it moral life. That framework is the belief in *tranquillitas ordinis*, a rightly ordered political community, which allows the human conflicts that are inevitable in this world to be resolved nonviolently and even channeled in creative ways while works of justice and love go forward. Such a political community, in this vision, neither rejects the use of power as though the harmony of the Kingdom had already been achieved nor reduces the use of power to violence and cunning in a Hobbesian or Machiavellian vision. In this contrasting vision of "moderate realism," power must be directed and circumscribed by law, by a "tradition of reason," by prudent calculations of the relationships between ends and means, and by practical wisdom. Furthermore, the American experiment in democratic pluralism and the resolution of conflict through public debate and electoral processes provide a so-far unsurpassed model of such rightly ordered political community. In this sense, Weigel argues, current Catholic approaches to war and peace do not need "to be depoliticized so much as repoliticized." Those approaches, he believes, currently assume that the fullness of biblical *shalom* can be achieved now or they translate political conflicts into psychological quests for inner serenity and personal understanding. Catholic war-peace thinking thus becomes essentially apolitical. It needs instead to recapture the centrality of this-worldly political life and the institutions and habits which support it; it "requires a recommitment to the moral necessity of politics."

The moral necessity of politics. It cannot be emphasized too much that Weigel is presenting the Catholic understanding of *tranquillitas ordinis* as a moral vision and one morally surpassing the various forms of pacifism or anti-war activism he sees dominating the American church. Why is this so important? And why, as I suggested much earlier, could it prove a boon in a badly needed dialogue?

There have in fact been major changes in Catholic attitudes on war, peace, and morality over the last two decades, even if they are neither so drastic nor so unnuanced as Weigel describes them. Certainly Catholic intellectuals and religious thinkers no longer give the Soviet challenge to the West the centrality it had in the fifties and early sixties, before Communist ideology had lost its moral allure in Western Europe and the Sino-Soviet split indicated that even Communist successes did not necessarily equal Soviet ones. The legacy of Vietnam was nothing so sweeping as a rejection of the "moral worth of the American experiment" — to recall Weigel's formula — but the war did implant a deep and practical skepticism about the employment of military force as a "shield" for establishing democracy in the third world.



These developments rested on political facts and analyses which Weigel does not confront except by way of caricature. They did not in themselves constitute an abandonment of the just-war heritage but are quite compatible with it.

The growth of pacifism is quite another matter. Obviously it does constitute a challenge to the just-war heritage. Catholic pacifists readily acknowledge, even celebrate, the fact that adopting their position would be a radical turning point in Catholic history. Of course, just-war teaching is too entrenched in Catholic teaching to be abandoned by the bishops. And the ordinary Catholics in the pews are at most mildly dovish, not at all inclined toward pacifism or even nuclear unilateralism. It is, instead, the middle levels of active Catholics, especially those exerting leadership on issues of social justice who increasingly lean to pacifism. No, even that may overstate the matter: except at the nuclear level, most of these activists might still hesitate to pronounce themselves in principle opposed to any resort whatsoever to an armed defense. Yet pacifist discourse, a pacifist agenda, and a pacifist style dominate their public discussions. Opposition to armaments and military programs are prominently and sympathetically featured in the *National Catholic Reporter*. Even in non-pacifist journals like *Commonweal* or *America*, a good word for nuclear deterrence or simply for strengthening NATO's conventional forces (a step noted by the bishops as a means of implementing a "no-first-use" policy in Europe) comes rarely enough that many readers seem to be taken by surprise. There are undoubtedly a large number of thoughtful Catholics who believe, perhaps reluctantly, that a sufficient deterrent or a strong NATO are the best means for preserving peace, but at least in activist circles they maintain a discreet silence. An unwillingness to abet the military enthusiasms of the present administration may go some way toward explaining this reticence, but the matter, I think, goes beyond that.

What may well be emerging is a form of institutional

schizophrenia, a church adhering to just-war doctrine at the top and (with luck) at the bottom, while the middle strata, which interpret and transmit the teaching, have their hearts and minds in a different place. We already see some of this schizophrenia in regard to the bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace. The pastoral is, after all, basically a just-war document. Although it insists, in an unprecedented way, on the legitimacy of the pacifist option for individual Catholics, it reiterates the church's teaching that "governments threatened by armed, unjust aggression must defend their people" and "this includes defense by armed force if necessary as a last resort." Yet what remains at bottom an application for our day of just-war teachings has been most actively promoted (to their credit, one might add) by Catholics whose conception of peacemaking is drawn largely, if not totally, from the pacifist tradition. Even where the latter have made a determined effort to be exact in representing the pastoral, a certain confusion, not unexpectedly, has been the result. The just-war teaching of the pastoral is frequently treated as a kind of pacifism manqué. It is a halfway house where the bishops, belatedly released from the prison of uncritical nationalism, have lodged themselves until they (or their flocks) are ready to enter the truly Christian world of pacifism. The pastoral's just-war theory is a concession to inertia or pastoral prudence rather than an authentically *moral* posture demanding a serious response. All the more so the bishops' conditional moral acceptance of nuclear deterrence. Even some of the bishops have acquiesced in this view, defending their pastoral as simply "realistic" rather than right.

It should be obvious, then, why Weigel's thesis is valuable. It makes clear that the dialogue between pacifism and just-war principles involves not a genuinely moral position versus one that is "merely" political or practical. The choice is between two contending *moral* visions.

But does this picture of an emerging Catholic schizophrenia on war-peace questions backtrack on my earlier criticism of Weigel's historical account? Quite the contrary. Weigel is right to see that there is considerable confusion in the church on these questions. But his historical account actually puts a strait jacket on his theological argument. It misses the chief reason that "established" just-war opinion (e.g., in *America* and *Commonweal*), while holding to its distinct convictions, nonetheless has given a low priority to pressing its differences with pacifism. Both schools of thought share a presumption against the resort to violence, and both believe that individual Catholics must reach *some* conscientious judgment in regard to war based on moral principle rather than simply on national feeling or government command. It has been natural, although perhaps unwise, not to pursue differences as long as it seems doubtful that these common premises are widely and firmly held among Catholics.

Still more important, Weigel's exaggerated and inaccurate history does not do justice to the real grounds for pacifism's appeal. One is the return to biblical sources urged by Vatican II. Weigel discusses this but almost always critically, repeatedly dismissing scripturally-based pacifism as "fun-

damentalist" or "literalist." This won't do. Much Catholic pacifism draws strength not from literal readings of "proof texts" but from comprehensive understandings of the words and deeds of Jesus, whose name, by the way, appears rather infrequently in Weigel's pages. What Weigel calls the classic Catholic heritage has been a natural-law ethic in a one-sided way, cut off from scriptural and liturgical expression.

A second factor in the appeal of pacifism was suggested by a "friendly critic" of John Courtney Murray who wrote that the real question was not *what* are the ethical principles that could fix moral limits to war but *where* are those principles. In other words, where is "the community which is the living repository" of such principles? Murray replied that the ancient tradition of reason lives "within the Catholic church," but he immediately granted that this answer was not very satisfactory since that community was then doing little to apply this tradition to foreign affairs "beyond its contribution in sustaining the domestic mood of anti-Communism." On the other hand, a great many, even though not all, pacifists have acted within living communities of service that lend particular persuasiveness to pacifist principles.

The third basis for pacifism's increased appeal is the unprecedented character of nuclear war and the near intractability in traditional Catholic moral terms of the problem of nuclear deterrence. About the latter Weigel says relatively little. About the former, he can only warn at several points against the sin of "survivalism."

Weigel insists that Catholics "must think harder" about pacifism, and he is right; I tried to urge this point two years ago in an essay, "Appointment with Hitler" (*Commonweal*, July 12, 1985). Catholic pacifism has never passed through the kind of critique its Protestant counterpart received from the Niebuhrians. Its experience is brave but historically limited; it remains innocent of serious reflection on even so obvious a topic as the morality of the anti-Nazi war in Europe. It is rich in commitment and personal spirituality, much less so in rigorously thought-out theology and politics.

But the current pacifist "edge" strongly reflects the weaknesses — notwithstanding the many near-hagiographic references these days to John Courtney Murray — of the just-war heritage. Just-war analysis remains the preserve of political scientists and international affairs specialists. It has little touch with the living words of Scripture and liturgy. Its practicality, either as a guide for statesmen or for ordinary citizens, has been criticized, and even its theoretical capacities have been severely tested by nuclear deterrence.

Unfortunately, *Tranquillitas Ordinis* does not explore these issues. Even more unfortunate is its negative tone toward the one document that does try to place pacifism and just-war theory in some kind of dialogue — the bishops' pastoral. Weigel does offer a number of useful proposals for the church's peacemaking, from urging greater attention to Communist persecution to warning against investing undue energy in specific policy proposals. Weigel rightly insists that

the quality of religious teaching on war and peace should be judged not by its stridency or purity of intention but by its truth. The need for the church to create opportunities for civic debate on the larger background or "contextual" issues, the importance of genuine inculcation of the church's social teaching, respect for lay competence, the potential of cooperation with Protestant evangelicals, the wisdom of emphasizing "core rights" in human-rights campaigns, the importance of attending to the positive relationships between democracy and economic development — though some of Weigel's emphases may reflect his political agenda, the points can be well taken.

Actually, Weigel's politics also shape his conception of *tranquillitas ordinis*, which often smacks suspiciously of Wilsonian idealism. I detect the assumption that the world should properly be moving toward something resembling American

constitutional parliamentarianism writ large, a world order of nations enjoying relatively similar and democratic domestic regimes. That is an inspiring vision but it may also be an unrealistic one. Those who advocate less ambitious, provisional, or makeshift notions of world order, in which maintaining certain "rules of the game" among nations may take priority over implanting democratic institutions, should not be charged, on those grounds, with "abandoning" the Catholic heritage.

If that heritage is to be secured, it won't be done by shaving down its terms to fit our own policy choices, important as these may be. *Tranquillitas Ordinis* is valuable because it reasserts the moral necessity of politics. It undercuts its own case when, in a polemic disguised as scholarship, it tries to proscribe all politics but the author's.

Pascal Bruckner's 'Tears' & the politics of contempt

DISMISSING THE THIRD WORLD

STEVEN ENGLUND

A Frenchman — the demographer Alfred Sauvy, in a 1952 essay — invented the concept of "third world," and now another Frenchman is trying to disinvent it. Four years ago, Pascal Bruckner, a young writer, produced a brilliant piece of polemics (*The Tears of the White Man: Compassion as Contempt*, trans. by William R. Beer, Macmillan, 1986, \$17.95, 226 pp.) scorching what I shall punningly call the "tiers-mondains" — those radical chic "third-worldists" who wore Nehru jackets, talked about their guru in Madras, and passed their time denouncing their own government's policies. This last activity Bruckner sees as the giveaway: the "tiers-mondains" used the third world to fight their domestic battles. Events in the southern hemisphere got replayed as political theater in the north, the restagers thereby "demonstrating an intellectual laziness whose only aim was to preserve the socialist utopia of [their]

most childish fantasies."

The French title of Bruckner's book, *Le Sanglot de l'homme blanc*, better captures what the author sees as the "tiers-mondain's" masochism (*sanglot* means sob) than does the English word, "tears"; but the English subtitle, *Compassion as Contempt*, comes even closer to the author's tone and content. For Bruckner returns tenfold what he sees as the contempt lurking behind the third-worlder's compassion, "this mischanneled eroticism in love with its own reflection," this "gushing" and "ghoulish" pity that eventually "becomes a form of hatred" when the distant "beloved" lets us down.

No refuge, either, in Christian principles for the would-be magnanimous. Bruckner believes that original sin is misplaced in modern culture. "Guilt," he writes, "is what you have left when you run out" of good arguments. There's nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that our forebears escaped from what we now define as underdevelopment by launching an industrial revolution.

Bruckner has a truffle pig's nose for rooting out silly arguments advanced by blindered third-worlders — as, for

example, the journalist who "with a straight face" attributed homosexuality in Cuba to "leftover habits of Yankee civilization." He denounces the "great silence of the left" toward repression in China or the exile of the boat people. And, with brio, he compares the contemporary crop of third-world dictators to the ogres of European history. ("What is Qaddafi but a Bedouin version of Mussolini?" etc.) When, he asks, will the UN admit that anti-white racism is also a crime against humanity?

Between original sin and masochism, the radical chic have, to Bruckner, not only exculpated heinous third-world leadership, but refused to grant the underdeveloped world "the most basic freedom — the freedom to make mistakes, to be guilty in their turn." Would-be serious intellectuals have "reduced" entire societies "to a few salient features," notably their poverty. Such shorthand he calls "the headhunter complex," and says that engaging in it "is to kill the country twice." In sum, "the threefold sin of abstraction, skepticism, and lukewarmness" has been substituted for what should be "the unremitting effort to put oneself in the place of others,

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the rite of passage of all researchers."

Bruckner also turns his attention to the "pop ecumenicism," as he dubs certain Westerners' tendencies to revere third-world cultural or religious institutions: "The sacred texts of the Orient have been mistaken for the Orient itself. . . . The Ashram becomes the Club Med of the mind." And he has an easy time mocking those melodramatic assertions we all got an earful of in the seventies: the south is dying of hunger because the north is overfed; or the observation that "during the six hours you will take to read this book, 2500 people will die of hunger." He mocks the notion that Western political freedoms are somehow "the bright side" of a brutal, subtle, "inequality that condemns three-quarters of the human race to the darkness of poverty and the biological struggle for survival." The actual impact of blaming the West for the "gigantic Buchenwald" that is the third world is not to mobilize people, says Bruckner, but rather "to make them yawn" (or change channels).

At the end of this long attack comes a long conclusion in which Bruckner offers his remedy: Western third-worldists must extricate themselves from the "self-hatred" that has "become a central dogma of our culture." They should appreciate their own society and history — notably the tradition of self-criticism,

which, even more than financial aid, is needed in the third world.

More to the point, however, we must cease to think in terms of a unity called "third world." Reality is too complex: "Far from being a single, powerful community, a global village, in which all people are equidistant," the planet has "once again become a swarming of tribes that are hostile and mistrustful." The fact that mass media and cheap travel make it easier to conceive "other societies does not mean that they have become understandable to us; on the contrary they have increased our incomprehension and obscurity. . . . The globe may be small and finite, but it has never before been so dark."

Out of this darkness, there are no easy exits. Regarding underdeveloped countries, we now know from hard experience (i.e., of colonialism as well as its self-hating antithesis, "third-worldism") what not to do. Beyond this we only know we must "develop patterns of thought that are appropriate. . . . History has become improvisation again." Of what those improvisations might consist, the author says little except to warn us repeatedly not to attempt too much: "To be effective, responsibility must choose a limited field of action. . . . What prevents us from loving all [of our fellow men] is what allows us to help some of them."

have tried to present Bruckner's position and style as fully as space permits because I think he is profoundly misguided. His is a seductive, but dangerous argument that has a growing number of American imitators and admirers. *Tears* was predictably heralded by Jeane Kirkpatrick as "a powerful antidote to fashionable self-deceptions" and proof that "what passes for sympathy today" is really "self-serving."

At the outset Bruckner writes, in a confessional tone, "I do not wish to wage yet another campaign of denunciation. . . . I do not aim to settle accounts. My criticism here is above all a criticism of myself, [for] I myself was part and parcel of [the third-worlders'] excesses."

As a statement of intention this is incredibly disingenuous. *The Tears of the White Man* is as irenic as Zola's "*J'accuse*." But in one very important sense Bruckner's prefatory "confession" is useful: as a taste of what we are in for. *Tears* is a political attack devilishly masquerading as psychological analysis. To take the book only on its own terms, as some American reviewers have done, is to conceive of third-worldism as a neurosis. Given such terms, Pascal Bruckner's opponents are at the same disadvantage that opponents of orthodox Freudianism sometimes face: they have to defend their mental stability rather than debate the merits (or the politics) of the issue.

The issue of third-worldism is, of course, profoundly political. This may be rather less so in the U.S. (though since Vietnam it has been edging up on the charts) than in the ex-colonial powers where it would be hard to find a hotter topic, and harder still to separate it from every other issue of political debate — from unemployment to balance of payments to fixing cultural, defense, and foreign policy priorities.

In short, this book arose out of a political context and plays a role in it. In reducing third-worlders to a group of conscience-stricken masochists, Bruckner, for all his disclaimers, is making political capital. Let us see what kind, and how.

Religion & Literature

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- Reviews

Cultural Highways
Orwell's Obscured Utopia
R.S. Thomas and the Church in Wales
Dostoevsky, Christianity and Politics
by Thomas Whitaker, Eugene Webb,
Mary Gerhart, Michael Vander Weele

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Normally, a book which wished to "deacquisition" a major holding like "third world" from the museum of ideological concepts would offer reasoned analysis and empirical evidence. A small library of serious sources has been laid up in recent decades refining the concept of third world, yet *The Tears of the White Man* shows no sign of assimilating this discussion. Still less does its author, for all his paeans to "the other," evince much interest in the underdeveloped nations themselves.

Rather, the book's rare forays off the plateau of psychologizing have a different purpose. In one of his few reportorial sections, Bruckner vividly describes a tour of Calcutta in order to detail the effect on the foreign visitor's mind and sensibility of the endless waves of filthy, begging humanity that break on him every time he ventures out of his hotel. The conclusion the author draws is that whether you be "Communist, socialist, or simply a believer in democracy . . . you must temporarily put aside your leftist sympathies, because the intellectual construction of this position has nothing to do with the present situation."

In other words, "the Calcutta syndrome," as he calls this process, has, *and should have*, the effect of depoliticizing people, particularly left-wing third-worlders. In place of political commitments and theory, they should embrace Bruckner's rhapsodies to "otherness" and his dissertations on the final impossibility of "true" intercultural/societal communication. Yet on closer inspection, these adjurations turn out to be not just platitudes on the order of "charter flight is still the best vehicle for friendship between peoples," and certainly not stubborn empiricism eschewing easy generalizations (for Bruckner has no interest in empiricism). Rather, the goal of what can only be called intellectual Luddism is to seek to remove a key concept ("third world") from debate. The effect of this, not surprisingly, is politically reactionary. The ploy is familiar. For more than a century, anti-Marxists have been claiming that "class" and "bourgeoisie" have "no more meaning," just as socialists have challenged the objectivity and admissi-

bility of the hallowed notions of "nation" and "fatherland."

What's interesting and new in Bruckner's case is that here one splinter of the political right — a neo-conservative crew of disillusioned radicals and ex-Maoists — has tossed overboard a concept ("third world") which another, far more senior and powerful segment of the right long ago appropriated and still makes considerable capital from. It was not John Lennon or Jean-Paul Sartre but the

elites of banking, international business, and church, as well as the colonialist forces in government who initially promoted the concept of third world for their own neocolonialist purposes, and for whom it still very much serves as an ideological centerpiece. Before the term is permitted to pass from usage, Crédit Lyonnais, Ford, the Ministries of Overseas Territories, and a dozen or so Christian organizations may have something to say.

A New and Penetrating Study!

The Future of Catholic Leadership: Responses to the Priest Shortage

by Dean R. Hoge

"This book should be read by every bishop, every vocation director, every member of every seminary staff, every person involved in the recruitment, formation, and evaluation of ministers of every kind, and any and every individual who has ever written or lectured or just 'sounded off' on the so-called vocations crisis."

Richard P. McBrien
University of Notre Dame

Here is the most penetrating and most reliable review of research on the priest shortage available today. In highly readable and non-partisan prose, Hoge describes the current situation and outlines the most likely future trends. Concluding that the shortage of priests in the U.S. is an institutional problem, not a spiritual problem, the Catholic University sociologist puts forward eleven options the Church has for coping with the priest shortage problem.

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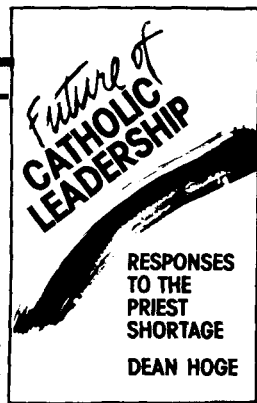
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The seductiveness, par excellence, of *Tears* is its childlike passion and sincerity. A *cri du coeur*, it reads as though its author gave little thought to "mere politics." In this, Bruckner typifies a certain breed common enough these days: the young, passionate, intellectual child-man, who "falls in love," for sentimental reasons and in a purely emotional way, with some Great Cause such as "*tiers-mondisme*." One could catalogue half this entire genus by scanning the book's footnotes, for many of the individuals Bruckner derides are, like him, "lovers" who occasionally made foolish declarations in the course of their idylls, and many of whom run periodically through cycles of commitment-disillusionment-disaffection-and-re-commitment.

But to confuse this minority — whatever the high visibility of a Bob Geldof and his "Band-Aid" — with the ranks of serious third-worlders (and in France they number in tens of thousands) would be like confusing the Moonies with religion in general, or student *gauchistes* with socialism. Many, indeed, will do so — including no small number of repentant ex-Moonies and reconstructed Jerry Rubinses — but all their "sincerity" won't prevent their renunciations from being political acts, useful to forces in the public arena only too happy to trivialize the cause at hand.

In politics, much as in faith or love (understood as something more than romance), a sign of adulthood is that people subordinate sentiment to reason. In France, as elsewhere, most third-worlders are politically committed adults who, even if they did take the time to inventory their emotions, would not feel "masochistic" or psychologically "guilty," but would, on the contrary, see themselves as working hard to oppose institutions and individuals who *are* responsible for, and in some cases guilty of, the condition that the world (first and second, as well as third) is in. The mass of *tiers-mondistes* are activists, working for religions, agencies, relief or economic aid groups, health and human rights organizations, government bodies, labor or trade missions, for whom com-

mitment is not a function of hot-and-cold running feelings, but day-to-day activity in a myriad of long-standing organizations, coordinated by a theory or theories which view the concept of "third world" as one relatively useful, if far from perfect, idea (among others) in grasping the international relations of power.

Bruckner again and again celebrates "self-critical reason," which he arrogantly arrogates as a European *spécialité*: "Europe alone has risked its own identity by uniting its cultures in anxiety and doubt." (This might come as a surprise to Gandhi or Ibn Khaldun.) I don't doubt that Bruckner is acquainted with anxiety, doubt, and self-criticism but in his case they operate superficially, by and on emotion, and they are located on the near, not the far side, of conviction. What Bruckner has in fact done is to throw off a youthful fling with third-worldism by neuroticizing it. Then he goes on to generalize his own previous style of commitment onto the mass of his former comrades, whom he can finally proceed to excoriate knowingly in denunciation masquerading as a pacific, apolitical confession. This is a classic instance of projection.

For historical reasons, the impact of *Tears* was strong in France. What one reviewer called its "brilliant wrath" has gone a distance to ridicule third-worldism in a culture where previously it had undeniable prestige, even from its antagonists. The author has convinced a certain number of center-moderate Frenchmen that third-worldism — if not a neurosis — is nonetheless a sort of passé mood, fad, or style. Some people who were once benignly disposed toward this cause are now unsure or even scornful. This is not really a hopeful development in a country where the right returned to power with a vengeance in 1986, where unemployment sits at 20 percent in many industrial regions (with no sign of decreasing), and where the ensuing social malaise is all-too-readily blamed on third-world immigrants — and not merely by the overtly racist, neo-nationalist National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

In the U.S., *Tears* has had a more modest impact, as far as I can tell. It has simply been another addition to the steady stream of neoconservative debunking of all suspiciously egalitarian initiatives. The American edition opens with an essay by William R. Beer in which he imitates Bruckner's confessional *mea (felix) culpa* style to a "t" while applying his psycho-reductionist argument with reckless facility. For example, it will greatly relieve Cubans, Filipinos, and Spaniards to learn that "the United States never had a colonial empire," hence we don't have the same "guilt-inspired" third-worldism that the French do.

Certainly the U.S. has its homegrown forms of infantile leftism masquerading as third-worldism. Building on that fact, Beer tries among other things to trivialize or belittle the Old and New Lefts, Black Power and the civil rights movement, the counterculture, and the cause of American Indians and Mexican-Americans (the latter two groups, Beer concludes, had only to imitate their Chinese and Japanese counterparts). As for women, they would do well to recall, says Beer, that "feminism was not the *cause* of increased social and political power for the American woman . . . it was the *consequence* of her emancipation." And not to forget, by the way, that Beer "hopes" that his indictment will be "part of the healing process."

No less than the French is American public life vulnerable to emotional appeals which conceal political agendas. It would not surprise me if other Beers, moved by Bruckner's "wit and style," stood up to "courageously" throw off what Ms. Kirkpatrick calls their "sympathy" not only for third-worldism but for all aid to underdeveloped nations and the UN (and for U.S. membership in the latter organization).

I get the impression that Pascal Bruckner retains traces of allegiance to the anti-colonialism of his youth. He may find himself making some strange and, for him, I suspect, uncomfortable bedfellows among individuals and forces considerably to his right. They will, doubtless, furnish him with the material for his next "sob."

Discerning theological malpractice

Last year, obeying the journalist's Aristotelian urge to classify, Don Wyclif of the *New York Times* suggested that the dispute between Father Charles Curran and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (SCDF) is best understood as a "trademark controversy":

The Vatican, which controls the official CatholicTM trademark, has withdrawn Father Curran's right to use it. Now, when he appears in the marketplace of ideas, he cannot represent his teachings as CatholicTM, that is, endorsed by the church.

It will be clear to readers of *Faithful Dissent*, Curran's partly historical, partly interpretive, partly documentary account of the struggle, that Wyclif got it wrong. None of the letters and "Observations" sent to Curran by the SCDF accuses him of misappropriating the Catholic "trademark," or even of challenging the Vatican's control over it. Truth in labeling is one of Curran's principal virtues. When his conclusions differ from teachings promulgated by authoritative Catholic sources, he puts up warning signs too big to miss.

But for the congregation and its supporters, Curran's candor is beside the point. What is at stake, from this viewpoint, is clearly if ungracefully expressed in a statement issued last August by Bishop James W. Malone, then president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, reprinted by Curran on the last page of the book. The "central issue" in the dispute, said Malone, "concerns the fact that someone who does not accept the teaching of the church on crucial points cannot reasonably expect to occupy a position which requires that he teach what the church teaches."

FAITHFUL DISSENT

Charles E. Curran
Sheed & Ward, \$9.95 paper, 287 pp.

Robert G. Hoyt

So it's a dispute about *licensing*, not trademarks. It seems to me that this makes a difference. One thinks of the procedures followed in disciplining other professionals (doctors, lawyers, professors of economics or literature): open hearings, heavy peer involvement, lots of rules. Such respect for process is meant, of course, to protect not only the individual but the profession and the public it serves. In the Curran case, as docu-

mented here, regard for process is all but nonexistent. And that raises questions.

Is a Catholic theologian a professional? If so, what is the nature of the profession — what does a theologian *do* for Catholicism, for the church, for the faithful; and what does "teaching" mean in this context? Does the theologian's standing in the profession make any difference to a judgment of his or her fitness to serve? What about the theologian's reputation for intellectual and personal integrity, for piety and pastoral commitment? If a theologian is to be delicensed for dissent on "crucial" points of doctrine, does it matter that dozens or hundreds of other practicing theologians

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO AND THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO PRESENT A SYMPOSIUM:

A CONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1987

THE CONSISTENT ETHIC IN CATHOLIC MORAL TRADITION

Rev. Richard A. McCormick, S.J.
John A. O'Brien Professor of Christian Ethics
Notre Dame University

Response:
Rev. Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J.
John Cardinal Cody Professor of Theology
Loyola University of Chicago

THE CONSISTENT ETHIC: A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE

John C. Finnis
Law and Philosophy
Fellow of University College
Oxford University

Response:
James J. Walter
Associate Professor of Theology
Loyola University of Chicago

THE CONSISTENT ETHIC: A PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE

James M. Gustafson
University Professor of Theological Ethics
Divinity School & Committee on Social Thought
University of Chicago

Response:
Lisa Sowle Cahill
Associate Professor of Theology
Boston College

THE CONSISTENT ETHIC: PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Rev. J. Bryan Hehir
U. S. Catholic Conference
Research Scholar and Professor
Georgetown University

Response:
Sidney Callahan
Associate Professor of Psychology
Mercy College

THE CONSISTENT ETHIC IN DISCUSSION

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin
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hold and teach the same views? Or that a certain number of bishops, thousands of priests, millions of lay Catholics share all or some of the same opinions? In sum — assuming, as I think Curran does, that there *should* be rules for disciplining a professional Catholic theologian — what are they?

Throughout his six-year correspondence with the SCDF, Curran kept putting questions like these, though perhaps with more restraint. Most of all, he wanted to know whether there are *any* circumstances in which a Catholic theologian may express disagreement

with *any* church teaching properly described as “authentic” but “noninfallible.” I defy any reader to find a clear answer in the congregation’s “Observations” or in Cardinal Ratzinger’s letters. The chief effects of these nonresponses are to blur and belittle all distinction between “infallible” and “noninfallible,” and to deny any measure of professional autonomy to a Catholic theologian.

Both to define his own criteria and to learn what guidelines the Congregation would propose, Curran several times cites those laid down in the U.S. bishops’ 1968 pastoral, “Human Life in Our

Day,” occasioned by the uproar over *Humanae Vitae*:

The expression of theological dissent from the magisterium is in order only if the reasons are serious and well-founded, if the manner of the dissent does not question or impugn the teaching authority of the church and is such as not to give scandal.

Curran contends that he has followed these rules. Does the congregation agree? No comment. Is a theologian who relies on them acting properly? Again, no comment. For the prefect and clerks of a

Miss Dickinson, no Emily, still makes me nervous

In those days, jacketed and tied, *Let us remembering* we stood in the Holy Presence of God, in those days when a part-time assistant adjunct instructor on trial taught, among other American poets in English 110, Emily, “Miss Dickinson” to one student — the archetypal prototype of Tyrone Power as a young dog — waiting at the door of my Tuesday 9:00 A.M. classroom, to ask if he might sit in on what I had to say about “Miss Dickinson,” in those days, he said, I had, he heard, “something” to say on Walt — not Mr., mind you — Whitman.

No, I said, politely, not pointing out the quite-a-difference between Walt and Emily; I said firmly, No, because I had nothing to say about “Miss Dickinson” (except not to call her Miss Dickinson) to justify his missing Calculus 107, that I would say the obvious, that, indeed, he would be wasting his time, better for him to refine his integrals — a Math Major — than listen to me talk Dickinson to Physics Majors: in those days we lived categorical academic lives and imperative ones: Instructor: *Live Jesus in our Hearts*; Students: *Forever*.

I lied, lying to young Tyrone, of course; I could say a thing or two about tetrameter-trimeter-dimeter-dimity Emily — but, to tell the truth, I did not

want to admit (too jejeune) she made me nervous; and, besides, that sharp and keen and controversial Major Physicist in row 6 seat 8 next to the window I used to wish he would be evacuated through to Heaven made me even more nervous, challenging every single comma of every single comment until I felt, on Fridays, that, indeed, the proofs of God as myth (“Without his myths, man is only a cruel animal without a soul.”) *quite just and accurate*, and Santayana was my Savior; and besides further, I did not want young Tyrone to be so subjected, too, to my embarrassment, that he should see his teacher, admired, made look silly by a mere Sophomore: he was too handsome for that, too handsome-hearted.

6/8 did, indeed, make me nervous, more nervous than Emily did.

I was a tyro, no Tyrone.

I had just recently been sprung from a monastery — purely & perfectly Benedictine in a Sears Roebuck bldg. (not so good as Sing Sing’s) where we chanted David, more or less on key.

And my hair hadn’t grown back, yet; and the scholarship on Emily was ferocious.

Yvor Winters.

I mean!

It seemed no one could be American Critic until one pinched 2 grains of in-

cense at Emily’s vestal shrine.

I think Winters got off with 1 — or 1/2.

But that the students made me nervous does not matter.

Hair grows.

And skin does, too: thicker, Sophomore by Sophomore.

But that Emily made me nervous — Walt did; doesn’t — is important.

She still makes me nervous.

And that is important.

Not the nervousness of “My nerves are bad tonight.”

And not either, though probably closer to, the nervousness, that fine delirium of Diana of the Crossways who found it less difficult than to be positively rational.

You notice the ploy of the delayed introduction; I’m still too nervous to talk about Emily.

Let me dismiss the kind of nervousness I do not mean, the not knowing what to say: you know, we want to say something but we do not want to say anything.

I can say this, after all: “Emily is the slice of eagle breast between Walt’s slabs (hunks) of cornpone, and until the young tyro eats this sandwich & digests it, he cannot be an American poet.”

(For in fact Walt does sandwich Emily, 1819 [1830-1885] 1892, the bottom [the top?] slab [hunk] just slightly thicker [11 after, 6 before] as Math Major Tyrone figured out — for Tyrone did come in and stayed three

Sacred Congregation, the considered views of a national hierarchy are beneath notice.

On the specific Curran opinions to which it objects — they have to do with contraception, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, and masturbation — the Congregation does not defend the merits of the church's teachings but only cites the sources showing that they are indeed the church's teachings. For his part, Curran defends his opinions only briefly; he is mainly concerned to show that his disagreements are on complex, specific matters that are "far removed from the

days [I was moving on to Longfellow] and got an A in Calculus.)

Or I could say: "There is only one perfect spondee in American poetry and it is in the poems of Emily," lifting arcane declaration from a poet who does not — as I live & breathe — say in which poem.

Or I could say: "It looks like dimity but it's really damask."

Damask?

Damascene!

That's not tin foil, that's steel.

That's no nail-file, sweetie, that's a rapier.

En garde!

Or I could say through an imagined resurrected Emily: "What are you doing rummaging in my bureau drawers?"

Or I could say: "Had Emily written but one more poem, she would be our most patriotic poet."

Or this: "One thing about Emily, she's no poetess."

Or finally: "Emily makes me nervous."

All great art makes us nervous.

Now I will have to write a treatise on *nervous*, but I would rather watch the rain . . . or read Emily to calm me down.

JOHN FANDEL

John Fandel, a professor of English at Manhattan College, was Commonwealth's poetry editor from 1964 to 1979. His books of poetry include Testament and Body of Earth.

core of faith." He cites the 1968 statement of the Canadian bishops: Catholics who cannot accept the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, the bishops said, "are not denying any point of divine or Catholic faith, nor rejecting the teaching authority of the church."

Contrast that with Cardinal Ratzinger's letter of July 1986, informing Curran that even if he were to stop teaching sexual ethics — which is no longer of central interest to him — he would not be suitable to teach Catholic theology; this because of "the organic unity of authentic Catholic theology, a unity which in its contents and method is intimately bound to fidelity to the church's magisterium." The function of a Ratzinger-style theologian is like unto that of a parrot, which if it learns impolite words must unlearn them or risk its voice box. One wonders: If John Courtney Murray were to return to life, and if (almost as unlikely) he were to change his thinking about religious liberty, would he have to choose once again between silence and recantation? And does the earth move around the sun? It depends on your century.

This book is not exciting to read, but in its careful, complicated, plodding fashion it does expose a scandal. The scandal is only partly over the demonstration that the spirit of the Inquisition is back with us (minus the rack). More serious is the damage done to academic freedom on Catholic campuses (not just at Catholic U.). And most troubling of all, in my view, is that the American Catholic bishops don't appear to see a connection between their shared responsibility for safeguarding the integrity of Catholic theology and their own mission to preach truth. Or they lack courage to challenge the resurgent power of the curia under John Paul II. Or both.

At one point, before the final Ratzinger decision, Bishop Matthew Clark of Rochester, Curran's own diocese, did issue an admirably forthright statement of support that went beyond praise of Curran's person to point out his recognition in "the Roman Catholic theological community" as a "moral theologian of notable competence whose work locates him very much at the center of that community and not at all on the fringes."

Regrettably, to my mind, Bishop Clark issued a further statement after the Ratzinger ukase was made public, accepting it "in recognition of the ultimate authority of the Holy Father" and "in a spirit of collegiality with him." Any lexicographer earnestly striving, amidst the fog, to define the meaning of "collegiality" is going to have a time with that.

But Clark did raise his voice at a time when it should have counted, and his remarks should have drawn some collegial echos. The others publicly involved — Chicago's Bernardin, Washington's Hickey, Youngstown's Malone — stayed safely, timidly noncommittal. As Curran suggests, we do need a respectable process for identifying theological malpractice, a process *at least* as open, fair, and balanced as those that have evolved in other callings, and one that does not simply sacralize the human instruments of the Holy See. But, as Curran doesn't say, we also lack any public method for discerning hierarchical nonfeasance. *Quis custodiet custodes?*

AT THE Crossroads?



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THE ADVENTURES OF TOM MORE

THE THANATOS SYNDROME

Walker Percy

Farrar Straus & Giroux, \$17.95, 372 pp.

John B. Breslin

In a recent interview in the *Washington Post*, Walker Percy chuckled over the media's continuing identification of him as a Southern liberal. He wondered how long it would take the critics to find him out as a deeply conservative writer. That the issue here is probably one of semantics adds a further irony, for more than most other contemporary novelists Percy has puzzled over questions of signs and their meanings no less in his half dozen books of fiction than in his two books of essays and reflections. For Percy, semantics is at the very center of his literary and philosophical concerns.

His latest novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*, set in the bayous of Louisiana some ten years hence, should certainly blow whatever "liberal" cover he has left. At least insofar as the word liberal connotes an uncritical acceptance of the utilitarian proposition espoused by one character near the end of the book: "We were after the same thing, the greatest good, the highest quality of life, for the greatest number." A few lines later Dr. Comeaux spells out the social engineering corollaries: "In the end there is no reason to allow a single child to suffer needlessly, a single old person to linger in pain, a single retard to soil themselves for fifty years, suffer humiliation, and wreck his family."

Tom More, the narrator and beleaguered psychiatrist we last met in *Love in the Ruins*, can only manage monosyllabic responses to his colleague's entirely confident assertions, but by this time the action of the novel has revealed how fatally slippery such linguistic signs can be in the discourse of

money, power, and pride.

Several pages later we get another character's summation which, for all the admitted dottiness of its speaker, is much closer to where More's (and Percy's) own sympathies lie. Father Smith's impassioned plea counters precisely the kind of "beneficent" medical attention Comeaux had been advocating:

If you have a patient, young or old, suffering, dying, afflicted, useless, born or unborn, whom you for the best of reasons wish to put out of his misery — I beg only one thing of you, dear doctors! Please send them to us. Don't kill them! We'll take them — all of them! Please send them to us! I swear to you you won't be sorry. We will all be happy about it!

Between that *cri de coeur* and the doctor's self-evident proposition lies the basic struggle of the novel, with the philosophically minded More caught dangerously in the middle.

It is the element of danger, assiduously cultivated in both its public and private forms, that gets Percy's philosophical debate off the ground. As I kept turning the pages, I wondered occasionally if Percy had been spying out Le Carré for narrative techniques, but in fact their two latest novels move in opposite directions: Le Carré becoming more ponderous in *A Perfect Spy* just as Percy has been revving up the engines for a smoother takeoff and a more sustained flight. Is this pandering to the Luddite in each of us? Not necessarily, for even philosophical novels have to get read, and the adventures of Tom More, part-shrink, part-sleuth, are served up with enough irony and reflection to warn off the pure thrill seekers.

The only demur I would offer is that Percy risks the charge of pandering to prurient interest by introducing child abuse and pornography into the plot. But in his defense, the issue is germane to the

social and sexual engineering plans of the novel's villains, and, to our collective shame, not as bizarre as it might appear — the UNICEF scandal in Brussels being a recent and particularly vicious example of such exploitation. It also focuses the moral outrage that gradually displaces More's perplexity over the transformation of his former psychiatric patients during his sojourn in prison. Sent up for illegally dispensing drugs to keep truck drivers alert on their long hauls across decaying interstates, More returns two years later to his parish of Feliciana to find the typical symptoms of anxiety and depression replaced by "a mild, fond vacancy, a species of unfocused animal good spirits," and a mind with the accuracy of a computer and its chilling lack of self-possession.

Something is definitely up. More's earlier research on the effect of radioactive isotopes on neurons leads him and Lucy Lipscomb, his cousin and fellow doctor, on the trail of heavy sodium. What they find is Blue Boy, a pilot project to turn murderers, rapists, the unemployed, and other social misfits into model burghers and peasants who are also — a serendipitous side benefit — remarkably uninhibited sexually. For someone like More who considers rendering the unspeakable speakable as "the best thing we shrink do," such a program has little appeal. When he discovers that his children are being boarded at a school whose owner has special interest in the sexual bonus of Blue Boy, he is propelled from philosophical dismay to drastic action, bringing the novel to its dramatic, and comic climax.

In between, More wrestles with his own personal demons, including a troubled relationship with his second wife, Ellen, whose bridge game has spectacularly improved thanks to Blue Boy, but whose personality has concomitantly suffered. Cousin Lucy offers some solace and would offer more, but for all his suspicions about Ellen's unfaithfulness, More still loves her. Their reunion at the end, and Lucy's with her renegade husband, constitute the major reward for the medical pair's intrepid efforts to save Feliciana from the dubious benefits of heavy sodium.

And then there is Father Simon Smith, holed up for most of the novel in a fire tower — a modern version of his famous namesake's pillar. And like him, Father Smith represents a radical rejection of the world, and all its works and pomps. A sojourn in Germany as a young man in the 1930s has seared into his consciousness the perils of eugenics: noble-minded, tenderhearted scientists who end up doing frightful experiments on children in Hitler's camps. He sees the pattern being repeated in Feliciana with its federally funded Qualitarian Center for ridding society of the unwanted, whether unborn or grown old. More is his natural ally, but a wary one for Father Smith is as unpredictable as the crotchety Jeremiah and as talkative as the Ancient Mariner. In his presence, More finds himself instinctively checking the exits.

When the room is six feet square and a hundred feet up a tower, such an impulse yields plenty of comic possibilities, and Percy fully exploits them. For all its deadly seriousness of theme and purpose, *The Thanatos Syndrome* is quite a funny book. Percy knows his world intimately, especially the voices of Feliciana's citizens, white or black, arrivistes or gentry, crazy or sane, and all the shades between. Here's the end of a conversation in which Dr. Comeaux is trying to enlist More to work on Blue Boy:

"I want you to meet my colleagues in Blue Boy. Tom, they're good guys. You'll like them. They're the best of two worlds."

"What two worlds?"

"Try to imagine a Harvard and M.I.T. brain who is not an asshole and try to imagine a Texas Humana can-do surgeon who is not an airhead."

"I'll try."

Percy's intellectual prejudices, so sharply evident in *Lost in the Cosmos*, break through here, but it is the laconic rejoinder of Tom More that gives the *coup de grâce*. Such exchanges occur frequently through the novel with More playing ironic straight man to the idea men. For another social slice, take this trialogue involving Hudeen, More's black, eighty-year-old, part-time house-

keeper; her granddaughter Chandra with a degree in newscasting and an eye on the local anchor slot; and the narrator:

I: "How've you been, Chandra?"

Chandra, frowning as she lands on Park Place with her little token, a flat iron: "Nothing wrong with me! Anything wrong with you?"

Shocked murmurings . . . from Hudeen, who overhears this — not real shock but conventional, socially obligatory shock: "Law-law ainoway-t a w p e p u h," eyes not leaving the TV. Translation: Lord, Lord, that ain't no way to talk to people, that is, white people.

If the abuse of language can lead eventually to the abuse of children, its purging can be seen to flow from such varied sources as youthful sass, middle-aged irony, and the mumbled conventions of secure old age. At the end of this novel, as much an exercise in analyzing language as in skewering engineers, it is the unlikely team of plain speakers that triumphs. More patients, weaned from heavy sodium, return to Freud's world of ordinary unhappi-

ness, and More takes up again the task of making the unspeakable speakable. Not a new heaven and a new earth, but "Paradise enow" in Feliciana, or anywhere else, for that matter.

Jeffrey Skinner

The Maple Keys

In their whirling descent they preach, they say there is no future like death, no kiss like the turned black soil of lucky landing. Matched, veined wings snapped apart, flew again from small fingers: Hamburg, NY, 1959. We spun around, arms out, sinking slowly in imitation. Grandma sat peeling apples on the porch swing, her quick eye measuring danger, the zone between us and the street. Grandpa, invisible as usual, pulled weeds from the feet of staked raspberries in the back garden. The sky bulged with clouds the color of ashes, then blackened over our game. And Jodie got hit with the first big drop in the forehead, went wailing up the porch steps, fell into arms smelling of flour and apples — Grandma. They went in. I watched a line of hail chase the sun down the street toward town, I put out my hands and they filled with cold marbles. Then sudden as the last day of summer the air warmed, drops spattered and broke in my hair. Grandma called from a window, but I was deaf, I was soaked with wonder. And I undressed in the loud pour, too young to separate my body from weather, ran to the drainage trough now swollen with two rushing feet of rain. I sat down among twigs and leaves carried on the stream's back as Grandma slammed the kitchen door, came running on heavy legs, her umbrella pulling her zig-zag, then inverting — flew off like a black jonquil. She cursed, yelled again but could not rescue me from such happiness, the water cold through my arms and legs, thousands of winged seeds swirling around my chest.

GUARDING THE GUARDS OF TRADITION

CULTURAL LITERACY WHAT EVERY AMERICAN NEEDS TO KNOW

E. D. Hirsch

Houghton Mifflin, \$16.95, 251 pp.

Tom O'Brien

Every teacher will have a horror story to back up E. D. Hirsch's best-selling complaint about education. Mine involves a bright student in a history and literature class on modern war who had just written an "A" paper on how Benjamin Britten's *The War Requiem* synthesizes liturgy and Wilfred Owen's poetry. The day I returned the essay, we were reading John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, and she began the class by asking, with a dismayed look, "You mean we did this?"

The student was a skilled writer, reader of poetry, and a fine musician.

She just hadn't heard. She was a typical American college student, as E. D. Hirsch points out: factually or culturally illiterate. He wrote *Cultural Literacy* after becoming concerned when Virginia college students did not know who Grant and Lee were, and adds reams of other anecdotes and parallel evidence. The problem isn't student intelligence; the problem is the disservice done them by curricula that neglect "facts" in the name of "skills."

Contrary to common belief, the many recent books and reports about American education reflect little consensus. In higher education, for example, despite calls for a vigorous core curriculum to provide what Hirsch would call "extensive knowledge" in several fields, many faculty resist such reform because it would mean thinking beyond specialization, and might involve rewriting a syllabus. The great secret of bureaucracies, as Dickens wrote in *Little Dorrit*, is

"how not to do it," and some of our nation's venerable tenured aristocracies have mastered it to the hilt.

Hirsch has a different target. Rather than blaming TV, he claims cultural illiteracy derives from pedagogical ideology, especially "romantic formalism," the belief (first prominent in the 1920s) that reading any text gave students skills transferable to all others. A corollary went that texts should be as simple, accessible, and relevant, i.e. something with which a student easily can identify. Hence, in public school reading lists, the end of the classics (even Shakespeare) as proper study for the average student.

Hirsch is fair in conceding that the grandfathers of romantic formalism — Rousseau, Wordsworth, Dewey — were rightfully angry at dry-as-dust-dead-as-doornail teacher-centered training, with Gradgrindian memorization of facts the norm. Knowledge is not always power if creativity is dulled in acquiring knowledge. History-teaching, as Austen joked in *Northanger Abbey*, has often seemed designed to torture students, not arouse their curiosity.

But in our century and our country especially, Hirsch shows that the displacement of knowledge from the center of education has resulted in a public school curriculum too centered on a student's prior experience, everyday world, and present tense. Students learn to read comfortably but more narrowly. To use two of Hirsch's terms, "intensive" development of skills has replaced "extensive" knowledge of cultural tradition. Such a classroom program means that children have little exposure not just to "the best that has been thought and said" but also to the plain facts of history, geography, and letters.

Some opposition to intensive reading in "relevant" texts developed in the 1970s, when Bettelheim complained that modern utilitarian school curricula ignored myth and magic. But in general traditional exposure of American children to classics, even in diluted form, is virtually non-existent, except perhaps in sectarian schools. (At Catholic colleges, professors can count on students with at least some knowledge of the religious and philosophical tradition of the West.)

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In Hirsch's view, romantic formalism has been abetted by ideologues convinced that knowledge of tradition means enslavement by it. Not all reformers are so narrow, but many feminists, socialists, civil rights and anti-war activists have claimed that learning the facts of the past means that students will more readily accept concepts, metaphors, and legends about traditional roles, leaders, or power structures — as if reading *The Iliad* made war mongers, or reading Aristotle made sexists.

Hirsch is conscious of their concern, and the need to prevent ossification of tradition, but he writes passionately to prevent our being ensnared by these absurd half-truths. A cultural vocabulary, he claims, is like a linguistic one: in motion constantly, never completely stable. "Cultural revisionism is one of our best traditions." The watchdogs of such a tradition must be guarded carefully; hence the academic struggles over defining canons. But Hirsch still claims that provisional lists of "what every American needs to know" can be provided.

Which is what he does, starting with five dates (1066, 1492, 1776, 1861-5, 1914-18, 1939-45). Any list by any (especially a self-appointed) guardian, Hirsch concedes, will be a problem; still, he thinks shared discourse requires some agreement over what we expect fellow citizens to know. If Santayana was right about history, some of Hirsch's dates are useful, maybe even in breeding resistance to war. Hirsch shows that lack of

knowledge can be debilitating: in a democracy increasingly dependent on technology, an illiterate citizenry is not free, but enslaved by *not* knowing. Further, the "tracking" of early subpar readers into reading-poor grade-school courses condemns them to a cycle of ignorance (another student in my war course came for help precisely because she had always been relegated to "art" courses in high school, and was tired, she said, of "not knowing anything"). As Hirsch points out, a tyranny is implicit in curricula that deny children's natural curiosity about their past. (One movie critic even claims, similarly, that despite Hollywood's lowest-common-denominator marketing, young audiences may actually like something better than the average teen movie.)

Hirsch's style is not always inspired; his second chapter contains too many graphs to prove his point on the value of knowledge. My main complaint is his term "romantic formalism." Hirsch is a Byron scholar, and surely knows romanticism's dark side. Surely he also knows how often the Romantics reflected long and deeply on the revolution in France and understood it not just as a political event but as a cultural overthrow of tradition in need of balance. Many on the left since then — Lukacs writing on Scott or Tolstoy, Germaine Greer on Shakespeare — have insisted that one can read past literature by focusing on the best in the old authors; their ideology (cf. Shakespeare's racial, sexual, and class prejudices) need not be enslaving. It was a Romantic, Charles Lamb, who anticipated Hirsch's point about curiosity in his beautiful opening to "Dream Children": "children love to listen to stories about their elders, when *they* were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great uncle, or *grande dame*, whom they never saw." Romantic, and even some radical thought is not so addicted to half-truths as to think that a brave new world can evolve from mere opposition to the mistaken facts, or mistaken emphasis on facts, in the old. One senses, behind Hirsch's strawman, the southpaw-bashing so *au courant* in the neoconservative air, or fog, around the Capitol.

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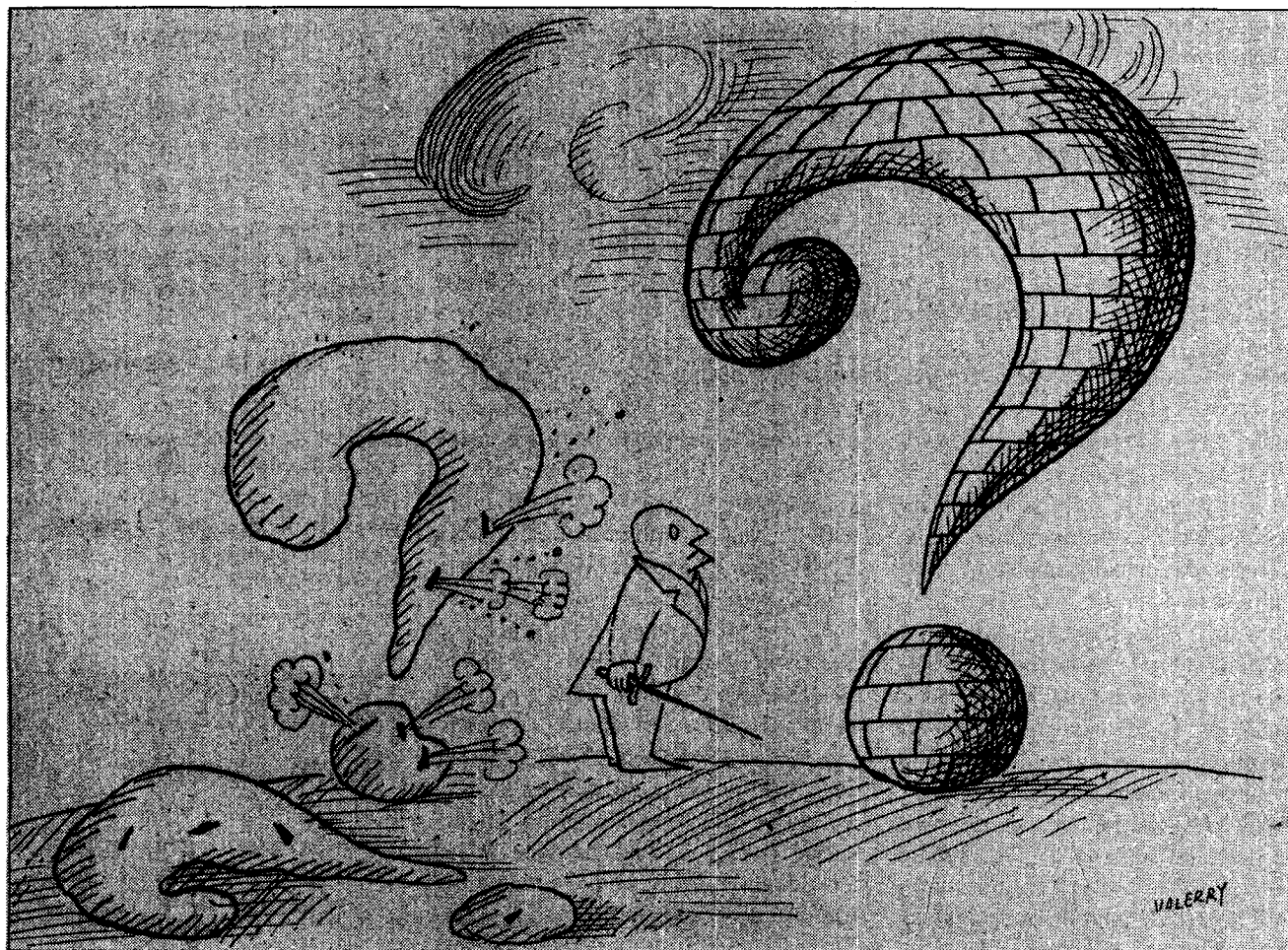
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